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Beyond Humanism

The Flourishing of Life, Self and Other

Bart Nooteboom

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Preface

In philosophy, I am an autodidact, I must confess. I started reading philosophy when I was 13. As a young woman my mother had been involved in theosophy and in her bookcase there was a copy of *God Is My Adventure* by Rom Landau. It intrigued but also repulsed me. This was not it, I was pretty sure, but then what was 'it'? What was philosophy? What did philosophers say? So I read Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*. At secondary school I read Homer, Xenophon and Plato in the Greek and Livius, Seneca and Ovid in the Latin. But I liked natural science and mathematics better. They seemed to allow for more analytical grip, which I appreciated. Though intrigued by philosophy I still felt uncertain towards it: I did not trust it, nor myself in it. So I decided to read mathematics, at Leyden University. I chose to follow the precept, allegedly from Descartes, that one day of philosophy per month is enough, and for the rest one should do honest, plain work. And I preferred Descartes's analytical geometry to his philosophy.

After my studies and military service I worked for the Shell International Petroleum Company in The Hague and London. I commuted to London by train, about one hour each way, and I used that time, sitting among stolid men in pinstriped suits and pink shirts with white collars, reading their pink *Financial Times*, to read Frederick Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*, in eight volumes, in shades of grey, most of them in two parts, some 14 books in total. For a long time my main interest lay in epistemology: in the theory of knowledge and truth. In later years I went twice through the series again.

After four years with Shell I decided that I would rather be a scholar than a manager, and having become acquainted with large business I went to work for a research institute for small business. There, in an econometric PhD study of retailing, I found it necessary to deviate from established economic practice, since customary models of production did not apply because retailing does not produce anything. Economists in the supervisory committee attached to the project told me that was not allowed. Why not? Wanting to find out, I immersed myself in the literature on methodology and philosophy of science, in particular the famous debate between Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos and Feyerabend. I had not read philosophy with any practical purpose in mind, but here I found that I could use my readings in epistemology. In the study of retailing, in deviating from established theory and models, I made the one genuine discovery in my career. It did not bring me fame because retailing is not a very sexy field of study in the mind of the scientific community.

I engaged in research on innovation and entrepreneurship. This reflected my early and ongoing interest in the dynamics of knowledge, which I connected to literature on cognitive science. I found that in innovation collaboration between people and companies with different knowledge and competencies was useful for achieving Schumpeterian 'novel combinations'. This brought me to the philosophical theme of self and other that is the central theme of the present book. Thinking about collaboration one inevitably runs into issues of trust, in particular the question as to whether in markets there is room for trust or only, as most economists claimed, for self-interest. As a result, my concerns in philosophy shifted from epistemology to social philosophy and ethics. Thinking more deeply about the theme of self and other and trust I finally, at the end of my scientific career, arrived at the present book.

The problem with being an autodidact is loneliness. None of my friends and professional colleagues were much interested in philosophy, and my conversations were not with philosophers but with their books – which is of course not really a conversation. Not having others to talk to I experienced how much of a handicap that is. Being isolated I am running the risk of making errors that would have been

corrected if I had had opposition. I did try, sending material to a number of philosophers in the field; but not being known, and not knowing people personally, I did not receive any substantive response except from one, Oliver Kozlarek, professor at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitano Cuajimalpa in Mexico City, whom I did meet personally, and for which I am grateful. I am also grateful for the comments of four anonymous reviewers received through two publishers. I hope that the present book will call forth criticism from which I can learn and correct my errors.

The Hague BART NOOTEBOOM

1
Introduction

What's wrong?

Has humanism outlived itself? Humanism can be characterized as an attitude to life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, recognition of universal human rights and values, and the belief in the betterment of the human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts. While it arose in the Renaissance, it received much of its substance from the Enlightenment. There is a disenchantment, a disappointment and a scepticism born of the inequities of the imperialism of the nineteenth century and the horrors of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century; and there is even a stream of anti-humanism. What remains of humanism if, in spite of the Enlightenment, or perhaps even partly because of it, humans turn out to remain capable of excesses of inhuman behaviour? The Holocaust and the Gulag were shocking not just for their scale of murder but for the systematicity and design of it – as parts of grand, idealistic projects to improve humanity. According to the well known saying of Lyotard, the disillusion from this put an end to our 'grand narratives'. And how humanistic are neo-liberal market economies? Most extreme in his denunciation of humanism and the Enlightenment was Theodor Adorno, with his saying that 'in the inner abode of humanism, as its very soul, rages a locked up tyrant, who as fascist turns the world into a prison' (2003, p. 100, my translation). Adorno's criticism is grossly exaggerated; however, answers are required to justified criticism of earlier humanism.

Much violence has been inspired by theistic religion – not least by the Christian religion – in persecutions, pogroms, torture and crusades; but now, having rejected such religion, and despite following the Enlightenment, humanistic secular modernity also turns out to be accompanied by violence – no less outrageous than previously and, perhaps, even more so. What is it, then, also in humanism, that allows for this or even contributes to it? I will argue that the root of much evil goes deeper than the Enlightenment and resides in Platonic dreams of unworldly universality and purity, of the truth being divine, and of a single God or fundamental principle being the unique truth – all of which were part of both theistic religion and the Enlightenment. It is part of a flight from the horror of the finitude of life and the vulnerability of the human condition in an unjust, unruly world to a heaven of universal, eternal truth and goodness. The goodness that is perceived here is seen as universal, and since it is attached to the single God that is one's own, those who think otherwise are outside goodness, are therefore evil, and to maintain purity they must be relentlessly persecuted, suppressed, expelled or exterminated.

I prefer a more Aristotelian tradition in philosophy, which recognizes human frailty, the inability of people to reach absolutes of the good and the true, the illusion of eternal universals, the tragedies that follow wrong choices, conflicting interests and purposes, and, in view of all this, a taste for moderation with, as Nussbaum (1986) put it so well, an awareness of the human 'fragility of goodness'. Humanity is driven by natural instincts towards evil, but it helps not to be afflicted also by the cultural virus of Platonism. It matters a lot when inevitable strife is not necessarily a fundamentalist battle of the supreme good against absolute evil.

While humanism recognizes the need to respect others and to take their interests into account, and to practise benevolence, it is taken as given that the individual, the self, is central and the point of departure. That of course is not new. That was the case from the beginning of Western philosophy, with the ancient Greeks and Romans – in Socrates, the Epicureans and the Stoics. What is new is that since the Enlightenment the self is seen as autonomous, free (in choice and action), rational and transparent to itself. In Kant's famous words, the Enlightenment is a growing out of self-inflicted adolescence ('Unmündigkeit'), the inability to serve one's reason without guidance by others. I will turn this around in the claim that our reason is limited by bias from the self, and for its constitution the self requires the other human being. I will discuss the Enlightenment in Chapter 2.

Romanticism opposed the stark rationalism of the self of the Enlightenment, claiming pride of place for feelings and expression of the self, and opposing an autonomy of the self, which is now seen as rooted in a shared national spirit. I discuss this also in Chapter 2. I will oppose the individualism of both the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which together regressed into egotism, greed and narcissism, a position which is morally and socially untenable. It is also untenable from the perspective of cognition and language. Therefore I propose a modified humanism, or a step beyond humanism, oriented more towards the other – towards the relation between self and other – not so much in terms of shared interest or moral obligation, as offered by the Enlightenment, nor in terms of collective culture, as offered in Romanticism, but in terms of the formation of the self. I argue, in Chapter 4, that at its highest level freedom includes freedom from the self and from one's own prejudices; and for that one needs an opposition from the other.

If humanism is seen as committed to a centration of the self, then that is perhaps the central problem of humanism. The turn to the other becomes anti-humanist when it is a turn to a collectivity in which the differentiation of individuals is erased, as in the interest of a state or ideology, such as in Nazi and communist totalitarianism. Here lies the source of twentieth-century evil: in the erasure of human individuality for the sake of abstractions and universals in collectives of state, race, nation or system. I am a humanist in resisting that.

Which humanism?

'Humanism' is a wide concept with different meanings. While its roots lie much earlier, the term was applied to a stream of intellectual activity in the Italian Renaissance that deviated from scholasticism and was directed to the study of the (Greek and Roman) classics. That activity was not anti-religious or anti-clerical and was conducted, among others, by priests and officials attached to the papal court. Later, in the Enlightenment, the humanism of the Renaissance was criticized for its distortion of classical texts by a subordination to the convention and maintenance of Christian faith (Israel 2008). One can say, I think, that humanism did not come into its own until the Enlightenment. However, it was recognized then that among pre-Socratic Greek philosophers (e.g. Xenophanes, Strato) there were precursors to some of the basic ideas proposed by Spinoza that defined the 'radical Enlightenment' (Israel 2008).

Nowadays the most current meaning of 'humanism' is an attitude to life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, and the belief in the betterment of the human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts. Also, according to this view, everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and to have the opportunity to flourish and be 'authentic'. 'Humanism' has acquired the connotation of a rejection of divine and other supernatural powers in a secular naturalism.

From the beginning, with the classical Greeks, the agenda of humanism was, sometimes implicit and sometimes denied, to maintain a barrier against barbarism, violence, popular frenzy or a breakdown of culture. In this it was conservative and aimed to subdue and tame people (Sloterdijk 1999). We also find in this conservatism an endeavour to lock humanism into a narrow, disciplined, fixed and elitist canon of Western classical writers and forms of thought (Bloom 1987). Here, perhaps, lie some of the roots of the disconcerting combination of humanistic culture and imperialism

(Said 1994). This humanism becomes a form of smugness (Said 2004, p. 54), and its conservatism freezes the flourishing of life. Nietzsche, in particular, militated against humanism for that reason. However, one can conceive of a humanism that supports the flourishing of life, while resisting imperialism, as I aim to show in this book.

Why maintain the term 'humanism' in going beyond it? Because what I am aiming at still maintains several of the features of past humanism, as I will show below. In particular, I take the striving for freedom and justice to be the core purpose of humanism, and that I preserve. However, as I argue in Chapter 4, included in freedom is freedom from the self, by way of self-criticism and openness to new ideas and new forms of culture. Said (2004, p. 47) has also argued that 'critique should be situated at the very heart of humanism'.

A fundamental issue is whether humanism is necessarily, in all its forms, at odds with religion in any form. I don't think it is. I think that the human being craves transcendence, not necessarily in a metaphysical sense but in the sense of a reaching beyond the self towards something one cannot fully grasp (Levinas 1993, p. 190). In so far as humanism denies the need and possibility of transcendence I am not a humanist. Being conscious of the finitude of life and its vulnerability to arbitrary, contingent forces, the human being is overcome by anguish. The fear of death and fear of existence and its apparent lack of sense has caused the human being to seek solace and a sense to this puny life beyond the self and its being in the world. I will argue that, for several reasons, the flourishing of life that humanism seeks entails a going beyond one's own life towards that of others and towards what one leaves behind after life. The only hereafter we have is the world we leave behind when we die, and that is worth living for.

Which transcendence?

Is transcendence always religious? Here I follow a characterization of religion as self-transcendence in a feeling and belief in a connection, a tie of the human being, to something divine or higher than the self that is 'holy', i.e. cannot be fully grasped and is awesome. This stops short of the definition of religion as used, among others, by the sociologist Durkheim, which also includes a set of moral rules, a community of faith, a church and rituals (Joas 2007, p. 68). Islam has a God but not a church (at least not in an institutional sense of a clergy acting as an intermediary), and Buddhism has no God. Transcendence is also related, I think, to the sense and experience or grasp of time as never ending, in the sense of eternity, or as a standing still, a suspension, a stepping out of time. That can be sought in an eternal being outside the world and human life, or as an experience within life in moments of feeling out of time, as time being arrested, of ecstasy, of being outside oneself.

Should transcendence be sought outside life, in God, or in life? In Dutch and in German there is a distinction between 'religion' on the one hand and 'godservice' ('Gottesdienst' in German, 'godsdienst' in Dutch) as a name for theistic religion on the other. There can be religion without belief in God in any customary sense. Transcendence does not imply that there 'is something' for the self beyond life, it can be part of life, though in life one can aim beyond it, to the life of others and to what one leaves behind after life – and that brings us closer to humanism. I am afraid that transcendence beyond the flourishing of the life of self and others, in God or metaphysical principles, would bring us back to the Platonic dreams of the absolute, universal and pure that have produced so much horror in the world. The flourishing of life does not entail a fixed identity of the self as Taylor (2011) suggests, but, crucially, entails a development and shift of identity.

The flourishing of life can be transcendent in four senses: as being engaged in shifting identity; as feeling out of time; as oriented to the life of others; and as oriented towards what one leaves behind after life. I am asserting that there is an 'immanent transcendence', which, though sounding like a contradiction in terms, is a transcendence that is not transcendence, a going beyond life that does not go beyond life. The strict separation of immanence and transcendence is an invention of Latin Christianity (Taylor 2011), and we do not necessarily have to accept it. I am saying

that life may go beyond the life of the disconnected self that is secular, i.e. in linear time, to a life oriented towards others as well as self, towards what we leave behind after life, a life that shifts our identity and may go outside linear time, in an experience of time standing still. Perhaps at death we experience time standing still, which then subjectively is the same as entering eternity. And if it is true, as some say, that that moment lasts forever, then, as our life flashes past, if it has been a bad life, then that moment may be like eternal damnation.

Transcendence through God tends, and is intended, to soothe fears and the anguish of life and death, and some philosophers question whether that is a good thing. Should the human being be soothed to snooze in contentment and reassurance, or should one, to attain transcendence, stand on the brink of the abyss of anguish and fears, face them head on and exhaust them, in life on earth, so as to rise beyond the self? That is the view of existential philosophers such as Nietzsche (1844–1900), Heidegger (1889–1976) and de Beauvoir (1908–86), who derive the meaning of life from a transcendence of the self from within, from existence, from being in the world, not from an outside God or a metaphysical principle. They see solace and sense beyond human existence as a chimera, a distraction from what matters and an obstacle to the flourishing of life and genuine existence. If humanism seeks this immanent transcendence, then in that sense I am a humanist.

Can the self transcend itself by itself? In this book I will argue that in life and in transcendence the self need not, indeed cannot, be central, cannot exist in isolation. If humanism does assert that then I am, again, not a humanist. If existentialism asserts that then I am not an existentialist. Most of this book is dedicated to the argument that the self cannot achieve immanent transcendence in life by itself but requires the other human being: transcendence can be immanent within life in relations between people (horizontal), not in a connection with God and heaven (vertical).[1]

Depending on which meaning of humanism one takes this book can be seen as a criticism of humanism and a philosophy that goes beyond it, or as moving along in a critical stream within humanism. On the one hand I go along with the humanist endeavour of striving for the flourishing and authenticity of the human being, human dignity, human rights, freedom from suppression and a criticism of religion in the sense of ‘godservice’. On the other hand I am critical of the humanist, Enlightenment inspired supposition of rationality, self-knowledge and autonomy of the human being, the pretension of progress and control of one’s future and excessive universalistic pretensions. I resist the obsession with the happiness or well-being of the self, of the ‘disengaged individual’ as Charles Taylor calls it (I will employ his work extensively in later chapters). That leads to a neglect and even an eclipse of the importance of the other human being, for its own sake as well as its importance for the self, and as a result also for the flourishing of the self, or so I will claim.

I will argue that the self is fragmented and imperfectly known, not even identifiable with itself, and that it needs interaction with others to form an identity. The self needs the other to transcend itself. In other words, it needs the other for its being and its becoming. It needs the other to fill the spiritual void of widespread present day narcissism (Lasch 1991). The self needs the other not as a mirror and confirmation of its self but for transcendence and replenishment of an empty self, for the discovery and acceptance of its limitations and the limits of gratification. The human being can flourish only by reaching out to others and by being reached by others. This requires a ‘putting between brackets of the self’ (what Levinas calls ‘passivity’) to open oneself to the other, and a view of the other as a fathomless source that the self can never fully grasp, and which as a result is an object of awe. It requires empathy and (a certain degree of) altruism. Counter to Levinas (and most other philosophers) I will argue that not only the instinct for survival and self-interest but also an instinct for empathy and altruism are part of human nature, as a heritage from evolution, and I will disagree with Levinas on other points as well. Nevertheless, I derive inspiration from him in my view that human flourishing requires not an inward turn to the self but, on the contrary, an outward turn to the other human being, a release from the self, a freedom from the self, not in God but in the other, precisely because the other is different from the self. My argument can be summed up in the following motto: being is becoming, becoming is interacting, and interacting is ethics.

Levinas goes too far in surrendering and subjecting the self to the other, as a ‘hostage’ as he says literally. Schopenhauer said that to avoid egotism one must erase any distinction between self and other, and surrender and dissolve the self in a Buddhist absorption into the One that equals the All. I resist that. I claim and argue that altruism, empathy and opening up to the other contribute to the flourishing and enhancement of the life of the self, not its denial or surrender. For the flourishing of life I derive inspiration from Nietzsche. I sail a course that might seem impossible, between Nietzsche and Levinas.

Philosophical roots

One of the meanings of humanism is that it sees man as ‘the measure of all things’, an idea that goes back to the classical Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (*c*.490–420 BC). Here lies one connection of humanism with the ancients. An underlying assumption of humanism, going back to Plato, is that the true is the good: knowledge contributes to well-being and freedom. In fact, however, untruth and deceit can contribute to survival, and current social psychology and brain science tell us that there is no full free will, that our actions are to a large extent driven by unconscious drives that we have little knowledge of. To unravel this I will discuss free will and cognition in Chapters 4 and 5. The conclusion will be that knowledge and rational analysis feed into the unconscious processes of the will and affect the outcome even if we don’t control the will. Knowledge does widen the opportunities for choice, reduces our subjugation to decisions made for us by others, and in that sense contributes to freedom.

The idea that the true is the good entails a faith in progress: increasing knowledge will yield increasing good. This has yielded ‘modernity’: the ascendance of science, technology and socio-economic systems of design, planning and organization based on measurement and control. In fact, however, while there can be little doubt of technical progress, progress in spirituality, humanity and society is dubious. In this book I will not engage in any dispute with science and technology. Technology is not intrinsically bad, any more than, say, language is. Technology gives leverage to violence, war and destruction, but so does language. In both cases one can do good with it as well as bad. I will argue, however, that social and economic systems cannot flourish under extremes of measurement and control, are tragic in the failures of their success, are perverse in their systemic effects, and require openness to variety, heterodoxy, deviance, uncertainty, ambiguity, mistakes and failures.

In the history of philosophy two rival approaches have persisted. One, going back to the pre-Socratic ‘sophists’ is based on rhetoric: human debate in a clash of opinions, based on knowledge and insight that derive from human experience and its change in the relations of man to the world (Copleston 1962, vol. 8, part II, p. 99). Knowledge is action in that truth is not fixed and given a priori but is developed in action, in work, in time. In later philosophy this tradition is found, for example, in philosophical pragmatism, according to which ideas are useful fictions that one adopts for action and adapts in action. It is also found in existential philosophies, as in Heidegger’s emphasis on being as a process in time (in his *Being and Time*).

The other tradition, going back to Plato (*c*.428–*c*.348 BC), despises ‘mere opinion’, mystical or poetic evocation and revelation, and reaches for absolute, universal, timeless truth in a ‘heaven of ideas’ beyond reality and for rigorous argument. Knowledge is seen according to a visual metaphor as a tranquil contemplation of immovable truths where all movement must cease. The power of the visual metaphor is exhibited in our saying, in daily language, ‘I see’ to mean ‘I understand’. This Platonic tradition has been very powerful and is found, to a greater or lesser extent, among the philosophers of the early Enlightenment, such as Descartes (1596–1650), Spinoza (1632–77), Leibniz (1646–1716) and Locke (1632–1704), and many later philosophers, notably Schopenhauer (1788–1860). The ideal lies in a philosophy as final and rigorous as mathematical proof.

Both traditions have yielded brands of humanism. I may be a humanist in the sense related to the first tradition, associated with pragmatism and, as I will explain, with

existentialism. I am critical of the second brand, associated with the Enlightenment.

There are elements of humanism in other and earlier civilizations than those of the West, e.g. in ancient China (Chen 2009). Buddhism has elements of humanism, in its rejection of an outside, metaphysical god and submission of the human being to authority, in its exercise of reason and the search for truth, tolerance, benevolence and empathy with respect to other beings. In the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions we find mystical streams, such as the Jewish Kabbalah and Islamic Sufism, which are humanistic in the sense that people find God not outside the human being but deep inside their souls, in individual, subjective experience of transcendence or ecstasy. I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Western humanism is also rooted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism. In Chapter 2 I discuss and criticize the Enlightenment as well as Romanticism. I criticize the radical stream in the Enlightenment (Spinoza, Bayle, Diderot, d'Holbach, Condorcet) for its exaggeration of rationality, transparency, autonomy and disconnectedness of the individual and for its neglect of the social in cognition and ethics and of the habits and other institutions in society. I also agree with the criticism made by others of its excess of universalistic pretensions, including the idea of the universal human being and a universal morality, which leads to a neglect of diversity and individuality of people. I share this criticism with, for example, Nietzsche and Levinas, as well as Horkheimer and Adorno, though I am not as radical in my criticism of the Enlightenment as the latter two are. I criticize the moderate mainstream Enlightenment (Descartes, Locke, Newton, Voltaire) for their dualism of body and mind that leads to neglect of the body and the unconscious in cognition, in feelings, instincts and bodily impulse (recognized in the radical stream, notably by Spinoza). However, I and most other people (probably) would not want to go back and surrender the Enlightenment values of reason, freedom and human rights.

In part, nineteenth-century Romanticism was a critical reaction to the universalism and rationalism of the Enlightenment. It sought the uniqueness of individuals or nations, took a turn inside and wanted to listen to the voices of nature in the human being. In self-realization and self-transcendence, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger sought recognition of existential experience next to reason, feelings next to rationality, imagination, art, authenticity of the individual and its expression. This contributed in a different way to the rise of the self.

All this has ultimately led to egoism, narcissism and indifference of people towards each other and towards public causes. The demand for recognition of the individual, in a rebellion against dehumanized universals, was justified, but it has led to an obsession with personal preferences, rights and grudges, to the neglect of the common good and the rights of others. Populist politicians have mobilized this, exploiting resentment and prejudice, in a revival of nationalism and intolerance that is destroying human rights.

Inner voices have become voices from a void. The urge towards authenticity has led to overestimated expectations of the potential of the self, a misplaced feeling of having a right to its realization, and a narcissistic denial of limitations to achieve an unrealistic potential (Lasch 1991).

I and most other people would not want to go back and surrender a recognition of existential experience alongside reason, and surrender the striving for authenticity and self-realization. Like some Romantics I am critical of parts of Enlightenment thought and I also seek recognition of the individual against the dehumanizing potential of universals, though in a way that does not finish up in narcissism – by shifting the orientation away from the self and towards the relation between the self and others.

The rise and fall of the self

My main point of criticism of much humanism concerns its preoccupation with a rational, autonomous, perspicacious and disconnected self. According to Todorov (1998) next to autonomy of the self and universality of human rights also orientation to the other is part of the core of humanism, and for that he used the term 'horizontal transcendence', as I do. According to my reading of the literature, however, that orientation to the other is limited and superficial, not fundamental, and is clearly

subordinate to the autonomy of the self, even with Montaigne (1533–92). What I mean by the more fundamental importance of the other for the self will become apparent in the course of this book.

To trace the rise of the self I will use the work of Charles Taylor (his *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*). Here I give a short account and in Chapter 3 a more detailed one.

There is a paradox. On the one hand we see a secular trend of individualization, towards a narcissistic self that seeks to seize the world as a mirror of its own excellence, trying to master and dominate it to satisfy its needs and its vanity. On the other hand we see a secular trend towards massification of tastes and consumption, and depersonalization, which conforms to prefabricated identities, roles and positions. How can the two be reconciled? How can individualization go together with depersonalization?

Since 1500 a variety of movements contributed to a development of centrality and dominance of the self. With Luther the human being's own, personal faith became central, in a direct relation to God, and with expression in daily, ordinary life. This contested Catholic collectivism of faith, with the church as mediator between the faithful and an exalted God. With the Enlightenment the individual was thrown back on its own reason, with the 'I think therefore I am' of Descartes. In the radical Enlightenment, under the deep influence of Spinoza, morality was no longer ordained by God but followed from the natural instinct of the human being to pursue its own survival and manifest its self and enhance its potential (*conatus essendi*; drive to existence). Here rational self-interest, not just as a fact of life but also as an ideal, began to develop force. It developed, in particular, in the utilitarianism of a number of British philosophers, from Locke to Bentham, and achieved its pinnacle in neoclassical economic theory.

While in the earlier Enlightenment the individual was an abstraction, with Rousseau (1712–78), in some of his work, there was an inward turn to the individual as an emotionally felt natural source of good, in contrast with corrupting influences from society, which set thought and literature on a path towards Romanticism. Rousseau turned Descartes's dictum around to 'I am therefore I think', to indicate that it is the self that construes perception, sense and interpretation in thought. Here, self-orientation developed as a non-rational, intuitive, emotional force of nature.

The notion of the self as constructing perception and interpretation developed further with Kant (1724–1804) (in his *Critique of Pure Reason*) in the radical idea that in knowing phenomena the knowing subject construes perception and knowledge of the world according to categories of thought, such as space, time and causality, which hide and prevent access to knowledge of the 'thing-in-itself' (the 'noumenon'). Here the knowing self gets separated from the world. Subsequently, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant proposed that morality is of a different order from knowledge of the world: the self *is* a thing-in-itself and it can freely and rationally choose to adopt moral imperatives of behaviour towards the other. While with Rousseau the self has a natural striving towards benevolence, with Kant morality is a rational choice that goes against nature. Here Kant made the revolutionary distinction between 'being' in a descriptive sense as material existence, and 'being' in a moral, normative sense of conduct and the meaning of life. However, as pointed out by Horkheimer and Adorno (2010), this appears to hang in the air, for it is not grounded in Kantian criticism, but motivated by the mere desire to avoid barbarism.

Opening the avenue towards philosophical idealism in what Safranski (1987) called the 'wild years of philosophy', the German philosopher Fichte argued that Kant's assumption of the unknowable thing-in-itself was based on an inconsistent argument. The thing-in-itself or noumenon is postulated by Kant as somehow having a causal influence on knowledge of phenomena, even if that is formed according to categories of thought that are not part of it; yet elsewhere Kant argues that the notion of causality is part of the subjective categories. If the notion of the thing-in-itself is derived from causality, and causality is a mental construction, then, Fichte argues (see Safranski, 2007), the assumption of the thing-in-itself is not justified and in both knowledge and morality the self is the source of everything. The only world that makes sense is the world construed by the subject.

Schopenhauer extended Kant's scepticism concerning the 'world outside' the self. We hardly know ourselves and we are driven by unconscious drives. He granted that we know the world only as a man-made representation ('*Vorstellung*'), but we do know for sure of ourselves that we exist in our body. While we know little about ourselves we do experience ourselves and of that we are sure. Schopenhauer broke down the idealistic pretensions of reason and the knowing subject, to recognize a non-rational experience of existence in the body, as a thing-in-itself. He attributed our drives to a fundamental and largely unconscious drive of the will to exist and survive, as recognized also in earlier philosophy under the term *conatus essendi*. This initiated an existentialist stream in philosophy, developed, among others, by Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Nietzsche first criticized Schopenhauer for not being consistent in accepting Kant's point, but then, in the end he himself went ahead to postulate a metaphysical 'will to power' as the fundamental principle behind the world. Nietzsche elevated individual will to power and 'Dionysian' forces of creativity and self-transcendence, ejecting morality in the process. Schopenhauer's will is a will to satisfy cravings that are in fact never satisfied and are exercised at the expense of others. Nietzsche's will to power was not a will to survive, nor a craving for something, but an ability to command and shape, a force of growth, an increase of the power of life. In both forms of will lies a fundamental and ineradicable egotism. The difference is that Schopenhauer deplored it and sought an escape from it in a renunciation of the self, while Nietzsche celebrated it as a Dionysian source of creativity and spiritual growth. The idea that the human being is fundamentally egotistic pervades philosophy, with the notion of the *conatus essendi*, the will to exist and survive and procreate. In the human being the drive to survive, if needed at the expense of the survival of others, is intensified and carried to a different level by self-consciousness and an awareness of a future for which one must guard one's interests by building property and power. People are also felt to want to achieve selfhood by distinguishing themselves from others, in what Plato called *thymos*, which is reflected in Nietzsche's notion of will to power (Safranski 1997).

For Heidegger also, in his earlier work (of *Being and Time*, 1993) the only thing that counts, in the end, is individual self-realization and self-transcendence without regard to others or society. Later, in a paradoxical and perverse turn to connect his philosophy to Nazi ideology, he shifted the heroic existentialist stance from the individual to the collective nation acting as one man (Safranski 1992).

Nietzsche's joyous Dionysian exuberance in thought and creation is more congenial to me than the incidental leaps from the dark desperation of being in anticipation of death, like a drowning person gasping for breath, of Heidegger's earlier philosophy. However, as history has shown Nietzschean and Heideggerian existential philosophy in combination with a neglect or even denial of morality, in a celebration of heroic intensification of feeling in the force of life and transcendence at the expense of the weak, undaring, pusillanimous majority, can contribute and has contributed to fascism.

The Romantic turn into the self in search of authenticity and expression achieved a pinnacle in the social upheaval of the 1960s and then trivialized itself in consumerism, where it became a mass phenomenon.

Some of the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger yielded successive steps in the ascendance of the self to its throne. Over many years, in the course of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the individual, the self, has been liberated from suppression by church, convention and state and has claimed a position in the centre of the 'life world', the world of life as it is experienced. Economists tell us that the private vice of egotism is a public virtue in the economy.

And now we are in a mess. We are taken aback by the results. Confused, we watch insatiable consumers, monomaniac managers, bonus grabbing bankers, indifferent citizens renouncing civic ideals, politicians seeing politics not as a calling but as a career, and overall narcissistic and exhibitionistic behaviour. We crave to be served by society without serving it in return. If we do not get our way we nurse rancour against authorities, which are decreasingly accepted as legitimate. We find others indecent but we resist curtailment of our own indecencies. The individual wants to glitter and claims

a right to do so.

Ordinary life is insufficiently spectacular, or seems empty of meaning, and we seek stars and heroes to bask in the reflection of their glamour, in a parade of celebrities on TV, a circus of sports stars, pop stars, movie stars, actors, TV hosts and stage seeking politicians. Or we seek it in the heroism of the hooligan, in the mimicry of gangsta rap, in the bashing to death of a passer-by just for the kick of it. An explosion of the self in a reblossoming of fascist tendencies that are lying in wait to be exploited politically.

Authority in ethics, art and science no longer exists; each of us claims his own standards of what are the good, the true and the beautiful. Every opinion is as good as any other. Science and scholarship are often seen as pretentious and irrelevant babble, perhaps not always without reason. Facts and rational argument matter less than authenticity of expression, in 'being yourself', personal opinion and emotion. Emotions are legitimate, even part of rationality, as I will argue later (in Chapter 5), but they can also obliterate rationality. We feel we genuinely exist only if we appear on TV, if only as a member of the audience of a show, applauding on cue. To get attention, people go to extremes of exhibitionism, hype or provocation. There appears to be a paradox: obsession with the self leads to a craving for public exhibition of experience and emotions to achieve genuine existence. In short: we revel in self-aggrandizement, conceit, egotism, impulsiveness, narcissism, disrespect and intolerance. The individual, as a basis for humanism, has fallen into inhuman behaviour.

When the self does go beyond the self, it is in a flight from the fear of death, submitting to higher, absolute powers or ideals that transcend human frailty, in religion, political ideology or nationalism. In nationalism and imperialism culture creates a collective obsession with the self and a blindness to the other. In defence of those ideals, one is prepared to submit to authority, group pressure and conformity, but this tends to be subverted into group egotism, exclusion, discrimination or submission of outsiders, fuelled by fanaticism. If you are not with us you are against us. Is there a way out between egotism and deliverance from it by submission to powers beyond humanity?

We appear to run up against the limitations of the self, to have lost our bearings and to require a new moral compass. Humanism as the enthronement of the individual has outlived itself. Levinas (1978) said that humanism needs to be rejected only because it is insufficiently human. We need a humanism that goes beyond the individual, which stretches to the other than the self, and finds humanity there. It might be called 'otherhumanism'.

Depersonalization

Now for the paradox that next to individualization there is depersonalization. Here I partly follow the analysis of Horkheimer and Adorno (2010 [1944]), though I think their position is extreme and they misunderstood the economy. We should take into account that, writing in the 1940s, they were mostly targeting the fascist system of the Nazis. However, as they indicate, people have become ensnared in systems of mass consumption, where consumers are manipulated to conform to stereotypes, following fads and fashions. According to economists the human being is the goal, as a consumer. According to Horkheimer and Adorno the human being is an instrument, a means, and hence an object, for the sale and production of goods. In work, people are caught in systems of an increasing division of labour and 'rationalization' in standardized production that conquered industry and is now encroaching upon former 'public services' such as health care. In the division of labour the human being is broken down into capabilities so as to maximize his or her efficiency. Work is prescribed in protocols, and performance is judged according to its conformance to those protocols. The room for professional discretion has shrunk. This is happening contrary to the insights of organizational science (on so-called 'communities of practice') that the practice of professional work is too rich and variable, with no two cases (patients) ever being identical, to be frozen in protocols. The evidence for this is that 'work to rule' is a form of sabotage. As professionals are given less leeway for judgement and case-sensitive practice, and are subjected to rules and monitoring of

their conformance to those rules, they lose the sense of alertness and responsibility that is needed to diagnose and service idiosyncratic needs, so that the need for rules is confirmed and the system is consolidated.

However, innovative entrepreneurship breaks out of existing systems and the 10 per cent of innovations that do not fail open the system to new developments. Entrepreneurs grasp avenues for deviation that Horkheimer and Adorno considered to be impossible in managerial capitalism. The new directions, failures and successes, and effects of innovation are unpredictable, though this does not fit the mindset of planning, programming and risk avoidance that has captured policy thinking – and there, up to a point, Horkheimer and Adorno are right.

Perhaps the most telling example of depersonalization in history is the suspension of individual conscience in the totalitarianism of Nazism and Stalinism. Perhaps the most telling contemporary example is that of the bankers. Collectively they are caught in a behaviour that individually they confess to be destructive of financial and economic stability. Banks profit from taking risks, but when things go wrong the losses are passed on to the public. They have to play along with this perverse game so as not to lose out in the competition within financial markets. Governments submit to the public interest thus being taken hostage, since they compete among themselves for the favour of the banks.

Where does this come from? First, I think that to a large extent it lies in the structural effects of social systems, where individuals get entangled in webs of interdependence, in organizations, markets and institutions, which yield public disasters from the unintended consequences of private motives. There is no plot or evil intent but an entanglement in systems of perverse effects that are difficult to escape from. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, participants lock each other into a perverse practice. As demonstrated by Foucault, established authorities (in prisons, mental institutions, health care, education) impose their norms and routines on people, not deliberately but as a matter of course, in the conviction that this is all for their best, to internalize them and make them conform; but this results in a loss of their autonomy (see Kunneman 2009). Adorno (1975) also discussed such colonization of the self by the social structure. But even this, I think, understates the problem. Such effects are much more widespread, in the assimilation, on pain of exclusion, of intellectual paradigms, concepts, cultural values, routines and expectations, in communities, organizations, professions, industries, markets and nations. And this is all the more compelling in its being more general, more inadvertent, tacit and self-evident, and less specialized to specific roles or positions. I will return to this in a discussion of power in Chapter 10.

I think that Horkheimer and Adorno also correctly identified a second part of the problem. Regimentation in systems of regulation evolved from Enlightenment ideals of reason as a systemic coherence of thought, and from that followed ideals of action in systems where, in a hierarchy of echelons, the particular satisfies higher-level more-general principles, in an ascending order of universality. The underlying paradigm is that of mathematical systems of deduction from axioms or first principles, which we find in Descartes, and, applied to the world as a system, in Spinoza. Rational order entails subjugation of the particular to the general. We have not yet sufficiently understood the totalitarian, dehumanizing consequences of that. I will discuss the lure of universals in Chapter 2.

Surely, the answer is not to do away with universals. Recognizing their totalitarian potential perhaps we can take them down a notch or two, disallowing them to become absolute, allowing for their limitations and for alternatives and leaving room for transformation. That is one of the things that I try to do in Chapter 6. In economics and society that comes down to finding a way to combine rules with room for escape, efficiency with improvisation, generality with idiosyncrasy, the economic system with innovation.

A third contributing cause of depersonalization, I propose, is that the human being has an innate drive, an instinct, to seek recognition of legitimate behaviour in groups to which it perceives itself to belong, and to exhibit loyalty and conformity to the group. I discuss the possible evolutionary origins of this in Chapter 10. There I also propose that this could have arisen only in combination with an instinct to mistrust outsiders, which under perceived threat can be mobilized to fight and if necessary eradicate the

their will to survival and differentiation. This inspired the ‘virtuous terror’ of the French Revolution and later forms of totalitarianism. Another approach is to surrender and accept the sorry condition that the world is unavoidably a state of war of all against all, and to even see this positively as a Nietzschean expression of will to power that can be sublimated into artistic and intellectual creativity. Accepting the ineradicability of evil in humanity one can revel in it and make that the purpose of life, as did de Sade, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Bataille. One can turn to fascism’s lust for systematization and the technical perfection of evil.

Or one can engage in the liberalist dream of transforming violent strife into the creativity of economic competition and Schumpeterian creative destruction in innovation in markets and political competition in democracies, with safeguards against a concentration of power. So far, this seems the most attractive position, but there are serious failures in the market and in the democratic process, and at the level of nations capitalism can yield to imperialism and war. Liberalism takes too rosy a view of the operation of markets and democratic institutions, of the rationality of people, of their autonomy, of their capabilities and access to requisite resources to make markets and democracies work according to their ideal. More importantly, liberalism neglects the fact that human beings are not autonomous but socially constituted; and for their self-realization and self-differentiation they need interaction with others. Liberalism neglects the tragedy of social and economic systems in which people are indoctrinated, herded and regimented, and the unintended consequences of actions in webs of interdependence.

Occasionally, philosophers have allowed for compassion as part of human nature. Rousseau was one of them, but according to him that applied only to the human being who was in an irretrievable state of nature, which was destroyed (in a ‘denaturation’) by society with its rivalry, economic accumulation and conflicts of interest. In the English Enlightenment Shaftesbury and Hutcheson allowed for moral sentiments, in benevolence and commitment to the common good, as part of human nature or instilled by God, next to a drive towards self-interest. Schopenhauer also allowed for an inborn penchant for compassion, which can, with great difficulty, be mobilized by turning inward in ascetic, mystical contemplation to bypass the ego and dissolve the self into a unity with the All that is nothing. Here, as in Buddhism and other mystical religions, the self is subdued by dissolving it.

There appears to be a gap in the forms of philosophical analysis which may yield a window of opportunity. In most cases, philosophers have set the individual either against a God or a metaphysical principle, or against a collective of state or nation. They have mostly set individuals against each other in the strife for survival or *thymos*. But what if in order to survive and to develop and distinguish oneself the self needs the other? In markets rivalry and the urge towards advantage is seldom without limit, and there is collaboration next to competition, and trust next to control, as a large literature on trust has shown. Without any trust so-called transaction costs would be too high for markets to work. For example, as I have argued and shown in earlier work, for performance in innovation one should collaborate to employ opportunities that arise from different, complementary knowledge and competence between people and organizations (Nooteboom 2000). Such collaboration requires empathy and benevolence. Differentiation between people and organizations is a problem but also an opportunity. The give and take required, in mutual opposition, might be part of a horizontal transcendence. I elaborate this in a discussion of the workings of trust, in Chapter 9.

As recognized among others by St Augustine, mystical introspection or immersion in the self is problematic in view of the ‘treachery’ involved in a fooling of ourselves with our view of ourselves – we need some anchoring outside of the self. Rather than looking to the church or state to provide this, as Augustine did, I will argue that we can find some anchoring in an interaction with other people. This connects with Wittgenstein’s (1889–1951) view, in his later work, of the impossibility of a private language, of making sense without linguistic interaction with others. An individual isolated from childhood might achieve some rudimentary coherence in the reference (denotation) of utterances, but mostly, for meaning, in consistent reference, we need others to correct our vagaries and inconsistencies of reference. I cannot have a pain and

(the moderates) there is a unity of movement and matter, with a self-generation of life forms from matter, without an outside creator-God, and consequently mortality of the soul, without a hereafter. The most influential sources were Spinoza in the radical stream and Locke and Newton in the moderate stream. However, I will indicate, as Israel does in much more detail, some of the important deviations within the two streams.

The Radical and Mainstream Enlightenment

Radical	Mainstream
Spinoza (1632–77), Bayle (1647–1706), Diderot (1713–84), d'Alembert (1717–83), Helvétius (1715–71), d'Holbach (1723–89)	Descartes (1596–1650), Leibniz (1646–1716), Malebranche (1638–1715), Locke (1632–1704), Newton (1642–1727), Condorcet (1743–94), Voltaire (1694–1778), Montesquieu (1689–1755), Hume (1711–76)
Monism: unity of body and soul, movement and matter	Dualism of body and soul; movement, development and faculty of thought given from outside
Mortality of the soul	Immortality of the soul; punishment and redemption in a hereafter
Atheism, God as totality of nature; no supernatural agency (God, angels, devils); nature self-generating	God as creator, providential, intervening in the world
Christ not divine	Christ as Son of God
No miracles	Some miracles (e.g. those of Christ)

The radical stream originated in the Netherlands, with Spinoza and his followers, had some influence in Britain but never dominated there, moved to France where it was at first in the ascendance, was subsequently dominated by the moderate stream adopted from Britain, but eventually won out again and in the long run had the greater impact on modernity.

The ideas of Spinoza were far from unprecedented in the history of ideas, as argued for example by Bayle (Israel 2008). The unity of mind and matter, body and soul, God and the world; the mortality of the individual soul; there being no providential God and no divinely ordained morality – all had been proposed before, in a variety of forms, by the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers (Xenophanes, Strato), the Stoics (Zeno of Citium), the Epicureans and Averroes (in the twelfth-century Islamic Enlightenment). In the second half of the eighteenth century there was a lively debate on whether Confucianism was also Spinozistic. The Kabbalah and Sufism have been compared to Spinozism on the grounds of their monism of God and the world, of the One being the All.

Being an atheist by way of denying God in any sense, even as the prime mover or as the totality of nature, for a long time was unsayable. One was already branded an atheist if one denied any supernatural agency to a providential God; or His intervention in the world; or His being a source of morality, of revelation, of providing immortality to the soul and punishment and reward in a hereafter; or redemption by Christ; or the miracles of Christ. To renounce that, as the radicals did, was seen by the mainstream to lead to a total collapse of any order in society. Therefore the legacy of Spinoza was fought furiously.

The Enlightenment did not directly yield a full renunciation of God, especially in the mainstream, but the notion of God changed. For Malebranche and Leibniz God is like a rational person, designing the world according to reasons and possibilities that are objective and independent of his will (Nadler 2008). His will is constrained and guided by His wisdom and reason. According to Malebranche this yields imperfections that God does not want, but he cannot or will not continually interrupt the laws he has

put in place with miracles to redress every case of injustice. That would mess up the natural order as a basis for rational enterprise. Here lies a shortcoming of God. For others that is unthinkable and contradictory to the essence of God. According to Leibniz even apparent evil and injustice contribute to the perfection of creation, even if that is not apparent to us human beings. The comparison is made with dissonants in music that contribute to the harmony of the whole. The actual world is the best of all possible worlds: other possible worlds would be worse.

Radical	**Mainstream**
Determinism	Free will
Rift between reason/philosophy and religion/theology	Consistency; complementarity between reason and faith
Reason, no revelation	Reason and revelation combined
Morality from drive to live and survive	Morality ordained by God
Society driven by philosophy, ideas	Society based on institutions, social dynamics
Equality in society	Equality in state of nature; hierarchy in society
Democracy	Constitutional monarchy; aristocracy

For Descartes, by contrast, God is not like a person. He is beyond our reason and understanding. He does not will or design or decide on the basis of reasons and objective truths beyond his power. God does not will things because they are good; they are good because he wills them. God has shaped even logical truths, and he could have made 1 plus 1 equal to 4. His will is unbounded in any way.

Couldn't one say that a Cartesian God who does not will on the basis of goals and reason is in fact not endowed with will and reason at all (Nadler 2008, p. 279)? Such a position leads to the view of Spinoza, who radicalized the idea from Descartes. According to Spinoza any view of God that is an analogy to man is an absurd anthropomorphism. Our notions of goodness, justice, goals, reason, intentions do not apply to God. With Spinoza, God stood for the world as a rationally coherent causal system, with no divine aim, intention or intervention. For Spinoza God is nothing other than nature and its laws. God as nature just is. To Spinoza Christ was not divine, offers no redemption and was no more than a uniquely inspired person who set an example to humanity.

Both Descartes and Leibniz believed in an immortal soul. According to Spinoza's view, in a denial of Cartesian duality of body and soul, the soul is rooted in the body and dies with it. Spinoza was punished for his heresies in Amsterdam by being banished from the synagogue and the community; other Jews were prohibited from taking note of his ideas and associating with him (Nadler 2001). Some of his followers in Holland received harsh prison sentences (Israel 2008).

For Newton God not only designed and created the world but intervenes in nature, e.g. to keep the planets in orbit, and he maintains the separation between matter and motion. For Locke, thinking is the operation on sense impressions of innate, immaterial mental capabilities given by God. For both Newton and Locke there remains an immortal soul, punishment and reward in a hereafter, miracles and a God-ordained morality. Voltaire maintained that morality is ordained by God but saw it as implanted in the human being in the form of an instinct rather than given by revelation.

The table above suggests a unity within the two streams that is not in fact there. In particular, there is a divide between philosophical rationalism (e.g. Descartes) and empiricism (Locke, Hume). However, Locke's assumption of innate, immaterial forms of thought that operate on sense impressions to produce ideas is not radically different from Cartesian innate ideas. Spinoza and Locke were close in their view that ideas arise out of sensibility and experience, having no independent existence (Israel 2008, p. 549), so that there is a correspondence between ideas and things (ibid., p. 527).

Hobbes (1588–1679) and Spinoza were in agreement concerning the unity of body and soul, in their denial of the usual notions of God, in the absence of free will and in their profession of the supremacy of reason over religion. But they disagreed over the issue of complete freedom of expression. Hobbes allowed a sovereign much more

leeway to suppress freedom of expression for reasons of state. That is why I don't know where to put Hobbes in the table. Bayle was not as egalitarian as Spinoza and on that point was closer to Hobbes. However, Bayle is counted as a radical Enlightenment philosopher and has had enormous influence in propagating Spinozistic ideas.

Many extolled mathematics as the paragon of reason (Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza) – but not all did. Bayle and Diderot, for example, were sceptical on this.

Hume agreed with the radicals in his rejection of a providential God, immortality of the soul, punishment and reward in a hereafter, God-ordained morality, miracles and freedom of the will. In view of this there are arguments for seeing him as a radical. However, he was ambivalent about a creator-God from the argument of design; saw severe limitations to the scope of reason and human understanding; recognized the indispensability of institutions, a moral function for religion, and the unforeseeable and unintended effects of social interaction; and accepted the inevitability of social and political inequality and hierarchy. So, on the political side he definitely belonged to the moderate mainstream. While he sided with the radicals in his acceptance of enlightened self-interest, including regard for the interests of others and for the common good as the basis for morality, in contrast with the radicals he thought that the human being also has an instinct for moral sentiments, following earlier ideas on this by Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Hutcheson (1694–1746). This is of particular importance for the present book. I will argue in several places that next to an instinct for self-preservation and self-realization the human being also has an instinct for social legitimacy and (bounded) altruism.

On the moral side, radical thinking hinged on the rationality of equity. As simply, clearly and rigorously as the whole being is more than its parts, it is rational to pursue not only self-interest but also the interest of others and the common good, and to adhere to the basic principle, going back to Hobbes, that one 'should not do unto others what one would not want to have done to oneself'. This neglects conflicts between self-interest and the common good. De La Mettrie (1709–51) recognized and radicalized this insight and maintained that, arguing from the nature of humanity, ethics reduces to individual pleasure seeking without any inhibitions from conscience. Regard for others is imposed by laws but is arbitrary and has no grounding in the nature of humanity. In this book, in Chapter 4, I argue that while in many cases enlightened self-interest is consistent with taking interests of others into account, that is not always the case. There are problems of free riding, the problem of the commons, and the prisoner's dilemma that locks people into collectively damaging actions. I will give examples later. However, I also argue, against the radicals, that next to self-interest human nature also has an instinct towards altruism, within bounds.

On the political side, for the radical stream human conduct and society are to be guided by reason and philosophy, while the mainstream has an eye for limits to reason; the role of gifted individuals; institutional effects; the role of social habits and norms; unintended consequences of social dynamics (Hume); a variety of societies according to climate, location, environment and religion (Montesquieu); and technology and entrepreneurship (the economist Turgot). It is not so much error that hampers truth and government as extant habits, routines, indolence, vested interests and resistance to change. Some radicals (such as Bayle) were sympathetic to the argument that rational philosophy was beyond the grasp of the common people, but they argued that it can serve to direct lawmakers. This, however, entails a breach of the principle of universal equality with a hierarchy directed by a law-making elite.

Kant was a rationalist in his ethics. Ethical principles are universal, impersonal and objective and apply to everyone, regardless of the consequences. With his categorical imperative, moral principles apply of which one rationally desires that they apply to everyone.

Rousseau stood with one leg in the Enlightenment – in the rationality of the social contract, resistance to the authority of the church and the importance of education towards independent thought – and one leg in Romanticism – in his recognition of the need for emotion, primacy of feeling over reason, introspection and the inner nature of man as the source of the good, and his writings that were an inspiration for the Romantic literature of '*Sturm und Drang*'. However, he also developed the idea of the 'general will' of a collective individual, the state, with a civil religion to bind people to

a social contract.

In spite of the variety of thought within the Enlightenment there are a number of common features. The different streams had basic values in common that formed the basis of ‘modernity’: a striving for tolerance, individuality, personal freedom, freedom of expression, legality and racial and sexual equality. However, this does not apply as fully to some as it does for others. Hobbes, Locke, Voltaire, Hume and Montesquieu were not democrats, accepting social hierarchies and not extending full tolerance to all (e.g. excluding Jews, blacks or women). The Enlightenment as a whole aimed to free humanity from the excesses of superstition, irrationality, arbitrariness, prejudice, backwardness and suppression by religious and worldly authority, and from hierarchy on the basis of birth, throwing humanity back onto its own insights and responsibility. The great significance of Descartes was that in his radical doubt he called for the questioning of authority and dogma, and appealed to one’s own thinking as the only justifiable basis for judgement. The Enlightenment sobered up thinking and disenchanted people away from pure speculation. The radical Enlightenment was also idealistic and believed in the possibility of improving humanity and society.

My position in all this is as follows. Emotionally and aesthetically my sympathy lies with the radical stream. I admire the daring, the intellectual coherence, the liberation and the idealism of it. I feel the appeal of mathematical starkness, which itself pulled me into the study of mathematics. I am thrilled by Spinoza’s philosophical analysis *more geometrico* (in geometrical fashion). I feel the pull of Plato, tempted by the absolute and universal. However, I have come to see more wisdom in an Aristotelian line of thought. Speaking in terms provided by Pascal, I feel the appeal of the *esprit de géometrie* but I also see the need for *esprit de finesse*.

I think the ideals of reason and universal freedom of expression and equality under the law are still worth striving for. However, I think history has clearly shown how unrealistic the dream of reason is and how perverse dreams of universality can become. I agree with Hume and Montesquieu that institutions and other conditions differentiate societies and that social interaction has unpredictable and unintended outcomes. On the positive side, I agree with Hume (and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Adam Smith) that people do have inborn ‘moral sentiments’ that help to curb perversities of self-interest. I discuss the latter in Chapter 4.

Rationalism

One point of criticism of the Enlightenment is that it is hyper-rationalistic, neglects the negative role of the emotions and feelings and overestimates reason as capable of delivering indubitable knowledge. Neiman (2009) claims that this criticism is incorrect. And indeed some philosophers in the moderate mainstream saw limits to reason, in particular Hume, who was of the opinion that reason cannot fully fathom the mysteries of nature and that in moral judgement ‘reason is the slave of the passions [feelings]’. Descartes recognized the importance of feelings as a motor of conduct, but he held that they are often in conflict with reason and must be and can be subdued by it. However, the radical stream (Spinoza, Bayle, Diderot and other French materialists) extolled reason as the source of morality rather than divine revelation, and they saw unconscious mental processes, feelings and emotions as supporting rather than disrupting reason (Israel 2008, p. 694).

According to the radicals reason cannot serve to underpin godservice, and godservice cannot be founded on reason, as Bayle, in particular, propounded. There can be little doubt that the radical stream saw rational analysis of causes and connections as the source of insight in both nature and society. In the mainstream, while reason was used to condemn superstition and to enhance individual freedom, it maintained an ‘irreducible residue of the miraculous’ (ibid., p. 126) in Christ’s divinity, in resurrection, original sin, redemption and divine providence.

The moderate view became mainstream because it denied a rift between reason and faith, and maintained the rift between body and soul so that one could go along with the Enlightenment without surrendering faith. As mainstream, it made the acceptance and profession of reason and naturalist tendencies respectable and widespread. In

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