THE POIESIS OF 'HUMAN NATURE'

An exploration of the concept of an *ethical self*

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To the memory of my husband, John Malcolm Worley,
my beloved soul mate (1946-1993)

And for Marianne and Luis, in whom their father's
generous spirit, inspiration and love, lives on

Abstract

This thesis inquires into our '*human nature*' through an interdisciplinary approach that considers some of the radical changes in intellectual thought at those key points in Western culture in which this concept has been centrally deployed. The broad historical sweep that this study covers finds the preoccupation with defining who we are and what we are capable of inextricably linked with the focus, at most of the pivotal moments examined, on a dominant impulse to conceive human beings as *moral creatures*.

The continuities and discontinuities in complex lines of thought about 'human nature', the origins and exploration of our 'moral instincts', and most importantly, of our sense of ethical commitment, is therefore central to this inquiry. Thinking of such an exploration as an ongoing *poietic journey*, and extending the etymological derivation of the term *poiesis*, the ancient Greek term for 'to make', the study hopes to awaken a sense of ongoing creation, an inscribing and revision, a process of meaning-making of the ideas that have shaped our sense of selfhood in the Western intellectual tradition; one that regards humans as rational and moral beings engaged in a search for self-realisation and fulfilment in our contemporary world. As a philosophically-inspired endeavour, this thesis traces the development of the salient ideas that have contributed to shape these modern understandings, but it also relies on the scientific investigations that have delved into the nature of our consciousness, our rationality and feelings, as important contributions aimed at explaining the conception of ourselves as *ethical* and *responsible agents*.

Beginning with notions developed in classical antiquity about what it meant for humans to live well and *to flourish*, the thesis follows the shaping and transformation of these notions as Christianity spreads throughout Europe. The ideas concerning human rationality and morality which heralded the scientific revolution and culminated in the European Enlightenment are then examined, as this is also a time when the endless debates concerning personal virtue and *goodness*, a product of the intellectual and religious legacy of previous centuries, and around what makes for a good and harmonious society, inscribe the foundations of liberal democracy in the

West. The new scientific understandings which displaced most theistic beliefs as the new grounding of Western thought and morality, anchored from the outset on a moral philosophy that increasingly absorbed naturalistic elements in its method and practice, is discussed next. While some of the more idealistic aspects of Enlightenment thought have often been contested, the notions that affirmed the freedom and rationality of the human spirit, as well as the dignity of our 'human nature' are found to have importantly resurfaced in a contemporary guise.

The last part of the thesis gathers some of the most recent findings that followed another equally important shift in Western thought, as the Darwinian revolution spread, influencing crucial aspects of philosophical and scientific investigation. The empirical research conducted in the past few decades, as the sciences have branched out and developed, has seen philosophy, evolutionary biology, and psychology in close collaboration with the neurosciences and cognitive sciences, all bent on further illuminating our 'human nature' and our moral disposition.

This thesis clearly favours a naturalistic conception of human beings as intensely social animals, endowed with a rational mind, a sophisticated language and many other evolved capacities, but it also places this understanding alongside that enabled by our traditions of cultural and social development. It is thus, framed by both *biology* and *culture*, that our 'human nature' and our *moral sense* have evolved, and it is in this complex interaction that we humans have thrived.

This 'moral sense', which could have emerged in our species as a combined product of the dynamic between our natural evolution and of our process of acculturation, has most likely enabled, this thesis also suggests, the development in humans of an extended sense of responsibility, a feeling of empathy and connectedness with other living beings, and with our natural environment. This 'expanded' sense of self may also underlie our natural proclivity to behave as *moral* and also deeply spiritual creatures, and *ethical selves*. These are concerns that our best scientific and humanistic thinking continues to address, and that guide the explorations and concluding reflections of this study.

Declaration

I, Leticia Worley, declare that the PhD thesis entitled The Poiesis of 'Human Nature': An exploration of the concept of an *ethical self* is 105,435 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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Contents

...any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man.

(Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, and *Selection in Relation to Sex*, 1879)

In this room – this lecture room, say – there are a multiple of thoughts, yours and mine, some of which cohere mutually, and some not... My thought belongs with my other thoughts, and your thought with other thoughts...The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousness, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's...The universal conscious fact is not 'feelings and thoughts exist', but 'I think' and 'I feel.'

(William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890)

From the mere fact that society exists, there is also, outside of the individual sensations and images, a whole system of representations which enjoy marvellous properties. By means of them, men understand each other and intelligences grasp each other. They have within them a sort of force or moral ascendancy, in virtue of which they impose themselves upon individual minds.

(Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1915)

*When I turn my gaze skyward I see the flattened dome of the sky and the sun's brilliant disc and a hundred other visible things underneath it. What are the steps which bring this about? .... The whole chain of these events, from the sun to the top of my brain, is physical. Each step is an electrical reaction. But now there succeeds a change wholly unlike any that led up to it, and wholly inexplicable by us. A visual scene presents itself to the mind: I **see** the dome of the sky and the sun in it, and a hundred other visual things beside. In fact, I perceive a picture of the world around me.*

(Charles Sherrington, *Man on His Nature*, 1940)

We are immensely complex animals, possessed of remarkable gifts – consciousness and abstract thought, as well as the ability to live rationally, morally, and meaningfully. But we are animals through and through. Unless we accept this truth about ourselves we will lack self-knowledge of the most basic sort.

(Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and How to Reconcile Them*, 2002)

The illusion is irresistible. Behind every face there is a self. We see the signal of consciousness in a gleaming eye and imagine some ethereal space beneath the vault of the skull, lit by shining patterns of feeling and thought, charged with intention.

(Paul Broks, *Into the Silent Land, Travels in Neuropsychology*, 2003)

Poised midway between the unvisualizable cosmic vastness of curved spacetime and the dubious, shadowy flickerings of charged quanta, we human beings, more like rainbows and mirages than like raindrops or boulders, are unpredictable self-writing poems – vague, metaphorical, ambiguous, and sometimes exceedingly beautiful.

(Douglas Hofstadter, *I am a Strange Loop*, 2007)

Introduction

This thesis inquires into our '*human nature*' in an interdisciplinary approach, considering some of the radical changes in intellectual thought at cardinal points in Western culture in which this concept has been deployed. The broad historical sweep that this study covers touches on some of the resultant social, political and economic transformations that have unfolded in the Western world, and finds in most of these twists and turns the same preoccupation with defining who we are and what we are capable of inextricably linked with a dominant impulse to conceive human beings as *moral* and *rational* creatures. The investigation of our 'moral instincts', alongside the many attempts made to explain the origin of human morality, is therefore very much seen here as a complementary theme in this study.

The breaks and continuities in complex lines of thought about 'human nature', and particularly those that concern the development of our sense of selfhood, the origins of our morality, and most significantly, our ethical outlook, are therefore central to this inquiry. Thinking of such an exploration as an ongoing *poietic journey*, the study takes the ancient Greek term *poiesis*, meaning 'to make', and extends its etymological definition, in line with its current use in the domains of knowledge where its original sense of 'forging' or 'producing' seems to have found resonance. This is how it is now most commonly, though not exclusively, employed in literary and artistic discourse, as well as in philosophy and metaphysics.[1] The modern sense in which *poietic* is conceived has also moved from its close association with the term *techne*, which Aristotle interpreted as 'art' or 'technical skill', but also as 'a reasoned productive state', the latter aspect of which Heidegger emphasised, reinforcing *poiesis* as a principle of origination, of a 'bringing forth', which seeks to be known by being

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[1] *Poiesis* is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek, and this word is also the root of our modern 'poetry.' Derek H. Whitehead is one of many contemporary authors who conceive *poiesis* as something very much 'in process' that also remains an 'undercurrent' striving toward the light of day. Dealing with the aesthetics of a work of art, he also sees the 'heart of *poiesis*' in contrast with the Greek *praxis*, 'the exercise of a will that accomplishes itself in action' *Poiesis*, is rather 'the production of *aletheia*', an 'unveiling' or opening of a world for humankind's being and action. (Extracts from Derek H. Whitehead, 'Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting Be', 2003, retrieved from the Contemporary Aesthetics archive at http://www.contempaesthetics.org/vol.1, 2003, 14.08.2011). For an application of the concept of *poiesis* in education and curriculum design, see the Ph.D. dissertation by Donna Lynn Trueit, 'Complexifying the poetic: Toward a poiesis of curriculum, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2005, http://gradworks.umi.com/31/99/3199765.html, accessed 15.08.2011.

brought into the light.[2] It is in such a manner that this present investigation also seeks to be regarded, as awakening a sense of ongoing creation, in which we humans are involved, a process that follows the inscribing and revision of the ideas that have shaped our modern understanding of ourselves and our culture in the Western intellectual tradition; one that regards humans as rational and moral beings acting in the world. Heidegger's analogy of *poiesis* as a 'bringing-forth', is here particularly applicable to the study of 'human nature' in its widest sense, as it suggests something like a 'threshold occasion', a moment of *ekstasis* and transformation when something moves away from its standing as one thing to become another.[3] This is also the sense in which our focus on 'human nature' can be understood; as a process that is continuously renewing itself and forever bringing forth new challenges and opportunities to 'stand out of ourselves', to satisfy the profound curiosity and restless nature of our 'human nature' and its constant desire to re-create it, redefine it, and apprehend it in all its aspects.

In tracing the development of the salient ideas that have contributed to shape such understandings, this study also relies on the more contemporary scientific developments that have delved into the nature of our consciousness and the emergence of our sense of selfhood, our rationality and feelings, as important contributions aimed at explaining the conception of ourselves as *ethical* and *responsible agents*, and at defining the traits and capacities that can be said to distinguish humans from other sentient beings The thesis thus reviews selectively a variety of positions and perspectives, from the classical tradition of European thought

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[2] *Ibid*

[3] Martin Heidegger refers to *poiesis* as a 'bringing forth', using this term in its widest sense. According to Alexander Ferrari Di Pippo, who looks into Heidegger's use of this concept in his essay, Heidegger's interpretation of *poiesis* undergoes a transformation in the 1930s, when he attempts to free himself from the transcendental Aristotelian framework in his metaphysics. This opens up a deeper horizon against which Heidegger then examines 'the Being-question', and which also paves the way, Ferrari Di Pippo suggests, towards a more comprehensive interpretation of *poiesis*. It is apparently through the experience of the *poiesis* of *phusis*, the Greek word for 'nature', that 'human production takes its bearings and distinguishes itself.' As Heidegger writes: 'Not only handicraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing forth. *Phusis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense. For what presences by means of *phusis* has the irruption belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom in bloom, in itself.' (Alexander Ferrari Di Pippo, 'The Concept of Poiesis in Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics'*, in 'Thinking Fundamentals, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 9, Vienna, 2000, pp.1-33, extracts from article, retrieved from http://www.iwm.at/publ-jvc/jc0903.pdf, on 14.08.2011). Heidegger's explanation of *poiesis* as 'the blooming of the blossom, the coming-out of a butterfly from a cocoon, the plummeting of a waterfall when the snow begins to melt', is also seen in a different encyclopaedic entry that also explores the notion of 'bringing forth' as analogies underlining Heidegger's example of a threshold occasion: a moment of ecstasis when something moves away from its standing as one thing to become another. (Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poiesis, 14.08.2011)

to the more contemporary thinking in both the sciences and the humanities, noting key developments, and following the ebb and flow of intellectual currents that has led in our time to the convergence of some important ideas. The unfolding of what can be seen as the *'poiesis'* of Western civilisation is also here presented as embracing the argument for reconciliation of some of the traditional philosophical understandings of human beings as capable and responsible moral agents with the more recent scientific perspectives that see humans naturalistically, as a biological species with distinctive traits and orientations. These two traditions, the humanistic and the scientific, the *biological* and *cultural* aspects of our 'human nature', this thesis argues, are essential to a fuller understanding of ourselves as autonomous, resourceful creatures, and responsible social beings with a proclivity for rational and moral behaviour.

It is only through a committed inquiry into our combined legacy, the biological as much as the cultural, that a true picture of who we are and what we are capable of will emerge, and a *holistic*, *ethical vision of our modern selves* can be fully realised. This is a vision that has at its core fundamental and rational principles of freedom, justice, compassion, and morality for each and all living beings - the principles that have inspired Western culture and civilisation. This is the aim of the inquiry that informs the conception of 'human nature' that most of us hold but also strive to honour, an old project that this thesis follows in its most significant and also its most recent manifestations, as it wends its poietic path, and points to a new way to best live our lives, and to best honour and fulfil our 'human nature.'

We need to forge a different culture at the dawn of this new century, one that fosters a holistic conception of ourselves that moves our science and our philosophy towards an informed convergence, a new *poietic* synthesis, which in the spirit of the complex *aesthesic* process of reception that reconstructs a 'message'[4] will deploy the best of our human characteristics, our rationality, our sensitivity and compassion for all sentient beings in a cultural and scientific rapprochement that brings together the best in our 'human nature.' This is the essence of the *poiesis* that this thesis envisages, an ongoing act of awareness, of meaning-making through interaction with others, an

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[4] *Aesthesic,* or *esthesic,* and *poietic* are terms used also in semiotics, the study of signs, to describe 'perceptive and productive levels, processes, and analyses of symbolic forms.' In this sense, we use this term, which derives from its original Greek meaning of 'sense', to signal the perceptive or receptive quality of the process of meaning production. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esthesic_and_poietic (14.08.2011)

openness and receptivity of the human spirit to ensure that we, and all living beings, partake in the ethical creation of 'what is good for man.'

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The incessant quest to explain the origins and development of our human capabilities and the motives that underlie our self-realisation and deeper fulfilment is here conceived, as mentioned above, as a journey of discovery, a bringing together of the notions that have enabled us humans to think and behave morally and rationally, as autonomous and responsible beings. In the *poietic* account that sees the ongoing reinvention of our 'human nature' throughout the development of Western culture, and the waxing and waning of different theories that seek to explain the origins of our moral concerns, this thesis can be seen to follow a fairly well-trodden path in the history of ideas in European studies. It nevertheless steps along it selectively, surveying the landscape and attempting to highlight the main continuities and discontinuities in this Western humanistic tradition, while it also brings into focus similarly-oriented endeavours in the scientific domain, which like its humanistic counterparts, have at times gained prominence or alternatively faded into the background in the relentless task of discovery and meaning-making that humanity has long engaged in.

Following this strategy, our narrative begins with the classical understandings of what constituted 'a good life', mainly in the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of this notion. As these traditions diverge and Platonic duality pervades Western Christianity, the thesis follows some of the philosophical and socio-political transformations of both schools of thought which remain influential to our day. The Cartesian revolution, seen as sustaining the spirit of the mostly Platonic dual conception of human nature, is also the point when the theistic strand of thinking that dominated European notions of individual and communal morality begins to fracture, as the Baconian spirit takes full flight in Newtonian physics and Lockean empiricism, prefiguring the debates that aim to encompass morality as a socially desirable good. The desirability of a secular morality, detached from its Christian, and later Protestant and Deistic understandings and constraints, is by this time seen to be gaining terrain.

The inevitable dialectical movement of these notions, their contestation and defence, and the many contradictions and challenges this originates, sees European thought arriving at a point in modernity when the rational and autonomous conception of the modern self develops, and individuals are regarded as persons worthy of dignity and respect, possessors of rights, and of moral responsibilities. The implications of this particular conception of the self, the Enlightenment legacy, for our humanistic and scientific understandings of ourselves and of the world, are then examined. The thesis centres next on some of the most relevant humanistic and scientific ideas which, whether based on a reconceptualised post-Kantian approach concerning the development of our moral agency, and the most recent neo-Darwinian thought and findings in the natural sciences, have repositioned our human species, revealing our common ancestry and the emergence of our distinctive human faculties, such as our conscious awareness and sense of selfhood, our language ability, prosocial behaviour, and our powers of reflection. The *poietic* journey here traversed is then concluded and summarised towards the end of the thesis. What follows is a description of the many explorations, the many roads and detours taken along the way in the *poiesis* of our 'human nature' and the shaping of our ethical selves.

Chapter One introduces some of the ways in which Western societies have sought to systematise how humans have understood moral motivation and behaviour, and the attempts to set these notions apart in favour of a more personalised, but also possibly timeless and universally applicable definition of *the ethical* as applied to human conduct. This short account sets the direction that the thesis follows, one of exploration of the various moral systems, as products of their time, while taking a tack that takes on board Bernard Williams' sceptical approach, and that finds affinity with Timothy Chappell's *ethical outlook*, arguing with him that 'what we value', while it unquestionably has to be rationally defensible, cannot be captured by any *one* moral system. Ethics is thus seen as what human beings have come to value as guiding notions for the way they act in the world. This view is more fully explained as the last chapter revisits and expands on this notion, where the thesis' main arguments are reinstated and summarised.

The first chapter then examines the classical origins of such principles as we can still invoke to guide human behaviour. Central to these understandings was the notion of

the good, in which the flourishing of human beings is determined by a set of principles that enable one to live well and to thrive, in accordance with the needs and values of society. The ancient world encouraged the pursuit of virtuous conduct for human fulfilment, valuing moral virtue as a source of honour, truth and knowledge. The self, or more appropriately the soul, or *psyche*, was tied in classical antiquity to the role an individual occupied within the Greek *polis*, reflecting that individual's worth in the community. This early conception, limited as it was within the hierarchical structure of Greek society, defined what we would now call a sense of agency that carries with it a responsibility for our actions in the world.

Attaining *eudaimonia*, or well-being, meant living honourably and justly, doing right, and faring well, as a way to happiness and moral success. Plato's idealised theory of truth and knowledge exemplified these values, and also inspired some of the ideals of moral and political behaviour that are still relevant in our time. Aristotle's empirical approach emphasised the role of experience for the acquisition of knowledge and the harmonious flourishing of human beings, aided by cultivation of the virtues. Central to Aristotelian philosophy, this defined the purpose, or *telos*, of human existence. The knowledge that can guide humans to attain '*what is good for man*', was for Aristotle the object of political science, and it is part of the legacy of rational activity that still pervades our moral thinking.

The ethical views of Epicureanism and Stoicism represent the last stages of Greek philosophy, before this was translated into Latin and adapted in the Christian era, competing with rival interpretations. Roman Stoicism in particular, emphasising personal freedom, granted human agents the power to control their own affective responses to internal experience, regardless of the general course of events in the world. The value placed by Epicureans on sober reasoning and peace of mind as the goal of morally good activity, and the views of both Epicureanism and Stoicism regarding justice, self-reliance, wisdom and rationality, would remain influential beyond their time.

The chapter closes with an examination of Plotinus' thought, whose mystical depiction of the soul's union with the divine strongly influenced later Neo-Platonic understandings, as this philosophy was debated and transformed by an increasingly

dominant Christianity. The attempts to further reconcile these views with an increasingly obscure Scholasticism, is discussed next.

Chapter Two follows the legacy of classical antiquity, kept alive in the texts of Muslim, Jewish and Christian commentators after the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Christianity had become dominant in the Western world from about the fourth century, and would remain so well into the eighteenth century and beyond. Greek philosophy and science, preserved in Muslim Spain, where Arab civilisation had spread in the seventh century, was only rediscovered by the West about the second half of the eleventh century, when translations from Arabic and Greek became available, and the works of Aristotle were gradually translated into Latin.

In the Latin West, Platonic thought was dominant until the thirteenth century, as various interpretations of Christian dogma and morality merged with Platonic mysticism, particularly in its Plotinian version. Augustine, the best known of the Church Fathers, took these ideas further, emphasising a rationality founded on the love of God in his writings. His ethical thought and the tradition of 'radical reflexivity' that Descartes would continue, was influential well past the Renaissance, and is still a source of inspiration in our times.

Much of the Christian writings emphasising inner motivation and personal responsibility before the thirteenth century derive from Platonic and Stoic schools of Greek ethics. The rebirth of classical ideals in Renaissance humanism was responsible for bringing Aristotelian thought across Europe, first through Arab philosophers, such as Avicenna and Averröes, who taught his works, and then through the Christian theologians who became acquainted with his philosophy. As Scholasticism spread in the region, Thomistic thought developed the natural law or right-reason moral theories that would become influential in its wake. A more scientific approach to natural philosophy begins to emerge from this time, and the notion of the 'double truth' enables a relation between reason and faith, foreshadowing the final separation of science and religion in the seventeenth century, a major *poietic* turn in our narrative.

Renaissance humanism brings a renewed Platonic vision of divine love, alongside with the idea that virtue underlies *the good* that makes humans happy. These and

similar notions first explored by Italian humanists, were complemented with the belief in *reason* and the force of *ethical obligation* in its Aristotelian exponents in other parts of Europe. As the new spirit of enquiry spreads throughout the continent, continuing the challenge that Copernicus and then Galileo had begun to pose to the established classical cosmology, Baconian induction establishes the basis of empirical observation. The notion of individuals as free and rational selves emerges as this more open society increasingly questions traditional beliefs and moral foundations and 'human nature' is constantly redefined in the thought of Renaissance Europe.

We thus find particularly in Italian but also in British and later Portuguese and Spanish schools of thought - the latter enriched by the flourishing of Jesuit ethics - the same concerns, linking morality, conscience, and practical reason to explain human behaviour. In Protestant thought, the force of reason is replaced with the power of divine grace, and the *self-exploration* that ensued and that Montaigne inaugurates, continues the line of Augustinian *'inwardness'* that still characterises modern life. Galileo's differentiation between objective and subjective properties in nature, together with a new mechanistic conception of reality and Bacon's empiricism, would nevertheless set the scene for the momentous developments that would follow.

Chapter Three examines how the universal vision of 'human nature' begins to give way to a conception of human beings that includes individual rationality and free will. Preoccupations then arise about the foundations of social life and the basis of political obligation, heightened by the religious turmoil and the political upheaval that characterised much of seventeenth century continental Europe. In Britain, the collapse of the monarchy in the Civil War of the 1640s, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, would keep these preoccupations alive.

The relation between *morality* and *human motivation* is explored in Britain early in the century by Thomas Hobbes, who proposes a covenant whereby individual and social good could live in harmony. His solution demands observance by all to the laws of civil society, rather than the laws and 'rights' of nature. Hobbes' beliefs are passionately refuted by Joseph Butler, who claims that the power of *reflection* in human beings, together with their *natural benevolence*, leads them to act in accordance with their inclination to virtue.

The century that saw the scientific discoveries that began with Bacon and Galileo, has its culmination in the radical proposals of Cartesian rationalism, which mark the beginning of modernity. Descartes develops a mechanised view of human subjectivity and agency in which reason would make human beings 'masters and possessors of nature.' His dualist conception of human rationality has since engaged intense scientific and philosophical speculation, and found immediate opposition in both Spinoza and Leibniz, as they elaborated their own theories of freedom and morality. Leibniz put forward his belief in the higher order of reason operating in human beings through the power of reflection, which in turn reveals the harmony of the universe. His pre-modern conception of the self already signals a turn to the empiricism of Bacon, Newton, and Locke, and all the writers in this tradition who would redefine human reason and objectives as no longer part of a teleological universe.

The debate in the second half of the seventeenth century accompanies the desire to accommodate the best principles of human individuality and rationality in the emerging disciplines of political science and liberal economics. Moral concerns are thus universalised, and the private good is tied to *the common good* in a nascent political science that extends the norms and values of self-rule to the ruling of nations, thus giving rise to civil society and the ideal of citizenship.

Following in the empirical tradition of Locke, but inspired by the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson put forward a theory of moral sentiments, believing that individuals have an innate 'moral sense', and developing an ethic in which benevolence and sympathy play an important role. Such *moral sense* would be understood by Hume and then later by Darwin himself as the predisposition to sociability that is characteristic of human beings, an idea that Mandeville forcefully disputed at the time.

Reconciling private virtue with civic virtue thus becomes one of the main challenges and one of the main characteristics of Enlightenment thought as the eighteenth century dawns. This too becomes a concern of the new form of piety in Protestant societies, where an individualism of personal commitment is also tied to politics through social contract theories, with the value of work and the ordinary life prevailing in the Protestant ethos. The belief in providential design is typical of the leading Deistic strand in moral philosophy in both Britain and France that aimed to

combine moral philosophy with the knowledge derived from natural philosophy.

Chapter Four continues the discussion on 'human nature' and morality, specifically as it unfolds in the late Enlightenment in Britain, France and Germany. The different contexts that prevail in each of the European countries where this movement takes place are relevant to an understanding of their specific character. This new context is also characterised by a shift away from Deism, as an emphasis on utilitarianism and materialism, particularly strong in the French philosophical tradition, displaces providential design, ultimately dispensing with religious belief altogether.

Questions of self-interest linked to those of the common good continue to loom large as a new emphasis on commerce and trade brings increased economic prosperity in Western Europe and in the North Atlantic. As isolated communities give way to the modern nation states, the Enlightenment thought that engendered them is codified in new and idealistic moral formulations and legal systems. David Hume attempts to reconcile human subjectivity and sociality with the collective needs that Locke and others had emphasised, in his exploration of publicly agreed on principles of human action and behaviour. Thinking that our *natural moral sentiments* impose constraints on our behaviour, Hume sees benevolence and justice, linked to the principle of utility and the rule of law, as contributing to the happiness of all in civil society.

In contrast with the increasing prosperity and religious toleration that Britain experienced following the Stuart Restoration, in France the Catholic Church and the monarchy held tighter control over individual expression. In a more marked oppositional climate, materialism had a more important role to play, and such important figures as Condillac struggle to develop a mechanistic philosophy, tinged nevertheless with religious spirituality. Diderot, the other major *philosophe* and encyclopaedist, gradually moves from a broad Deism to a more materialistic outlook. In the midst of an increasingly anthropocentric view of scientific rationality, French Deism merges with English varieties in the thought of the French encyclopaedists, and the naturalism of the Enlightenment gives shape to the objections to this eighteenth century movement, particularly in the thought of Rousseau first, and then in Kant.

We thus find in Rousseau a different conception of human beings, whom he sees as naturally possessed of *'good will'* emanating from the voice of Nature. The tension between the natural and the social self in Rousseau can only be resolved in a redefined form of social contract that guarantees the freedom and stability of both the individual and the state. Inspired by Rousseau, Kant also finds in the practical faculty of reason a will in human beings that is also naturally good, and that we are bound to exercise by the force of duty. Such duty is, according to Kant, a 'categorical' imperative that contains the maxims for actions to be done according to a universal law. Kant also developed the debatable notion of a separate world of 'noumena', or 'things in themselves', apart from the world of thought, action and material causality, where moral freedom could exist. But most importantly, he saw *freedom* and *dignity* as the main attributes of all rational beings.

The Kantian notion of a rational, autonomous self, the pinnacle of Enlightenment thought, was the much-maligned subject of the reaction that followed. The expressivist current that emerges in the late eighteenth century typifies this reaction, with its belief in a renewed contact with nature as fundamental for self-realisation. Combined with later versions of Kantian autonomy, expressivism influences Romantic individualism and aesthetics, also providing the foundation for cultural diversity and for the development of a sense of community belonging, or nationhood - with both its positive and disastrous results in the modern world.

Chapter Five is taken up with an appraisal of our post-Kantian modernity, engaging with the different views of the Enlightenment project that some have regarded as a quixotic enterprise. For others, the European Enlightenment inaugurates all the ideals that have shaped our modernity, and linked by modernism, it is in turn defined by it. Defining modernity, particularly in terms of its 'legitimacy', becomes a preoccupation for some critics, as they examine these foundational ideals. Modernity may then be best characterised, as Pippin, and particularly Zygmunt Bauman among others see it, by a feeling of ambivalence that continues into the postmodern. We can, in this view, see modernity as an unending, transformative, open process that offers new opportunities for individuals and society, an ethical aspiration that can lead us to a kind of 'postmodern wisdom.'

The chapter turns next to examining proposals for realising this ethical aspiration in a reinvigorated vision of a *modern self* that keeps what is worth preserving from the Enlightenment legacy, while affirming its rationality and morality. The idea of 'enlightenment' as a general ethos or attitude is taken up in Thomas Osborne's exploration. Osborne adopts an anthropological point of view of our 'human nature', in which a new ascetic attitude allows for reflecting on the possibility of change or contingency. Believing that the social sciences can arrive at a new understanding that integrates the thinking of the natural sciences as a mode of relating to contemporary reality, he sees science as an 'aspect of enlightenment', an ethical attitude towards the world, of the kind that can dispel the distrust that has characterised the relation between the social and the natural sciences.

As a reflection of the initial impetus and inspiration for this thesis that the work of Charles Taylor has provided, a space is at this point created in the chapter to look in more detail at Taylor's contribution to the understanding of our moral sources, and to the development of his philosophical account of the self's passage from a theistic to 'a secular age', one in which the disengagement of the modern, 'buffered' self is linked to what he calls the 'malaise' of modernity. In this secular modernity, Taylor finds that even materialism has come to nourish new moral understandings, and a deeper sense of connection with nature, the universe, and all living beings. The 'exclusive humanism' that he sees in this naturalistic context, in a conflictual relationship to modern unbelief and a sense of immanence in an order of nature, affirms the moral order and the value of ordinary life, in a paradoxical eclipse/denial of transcendence.

Following Taylor's trajectory provides an opportunity not only for acknowledging its profound influence and significance, but it also allows for a more open and detailed critique of his work, inspiring further reflections. As part of this critique, some of the unresolved tensions and the perceived ambivalence in Taylor's claims are also taken up in our own examination and that of selected critics. Karl Smith is one of the more recent writers who has also extended Taylor's thinking with a reconfigured notion of a 'porous self', capable of rising to the challenges of modernity while preserving its capacities and moral commitments to the principles of freedom, justice, dignity and compassion. His contribution thus honours Taylor's spirit while maintaining the essence of his moral philosophy.

In a similar way, so does Stephen White's comprehensive framework for developing an ethos of 'late modernity', as he reviews Taylor's foundations of our moral sources and expands these in a broader conception of subjectivity. The 'capacious subject' redefined by White is also a 'reasonable' subject, and is therefore equipped to address the predicaments that he sees as threatening our modern democracies. It is also a reflective self, that conscious of its finitude, has the ability to spread its late-modern ethos of dignity and autonomy, reaching out to other selves, and bridging symbolic cultural, racial or economic distances.

Chapter Six seeks to complement and extend the arguments for seeing our rationality and our morality as capacities that are integral and constitutive of our selfhood, of our 'human nature.' In what could appear as a somewhat unexpected shift, the thesis takes up at this point some of the issues that occupy the many contemporary philosophers who are increasingly turning their attention to theories in the natural sciences that seek to explain the origin of our human capacities and define the nature of our moral agency. While this shift in orientation may seem unorthodox, the direction that the thesis follows here is nevertheless a logical extension of the thinking discussed throughout the study, as it broadens its main concerns and attempts to bridge the work that both the humanities and the sciences have to date undertaken around these matters. Its inclusion is part of the holistic, ethical vision of ourselves and our 'human nature' that this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, advocates.

With this aim in mind, the chapter begins reviewing the different approaches as well as some of the proposals for collaborations between the sciences and the humanities that have so far been advanced. Owen Flanagan's naturalistic philosophy of 'human nature' eminently suggests itself for achieving this much-needed rapprochement and unified approach. The discussion that follows is thus concerned with evolutionary explanations of the origins of human behaviour, a terrain that has taken both scientists and philosophers into complex explorations to determine what precise contributions the biological sciences can make to account for human morality, and what this may mean for the understanding of *moral agency* and the authority of *ethics* as a product of human culture, biology, or both.

A brief account of the historical background and main features of the Darwinian

theory of evolution, and of its initial reception and development, begins the next section. The chapter then continues to examine some of the debates that evolutionary theory has sparked as it spread, enhanced by the advances in genetics and molecular biology, and more recently, evolutionary biology and psychology, as well as those brought by the cognitive and neurosciences. The impact of neo-Darwinian thought on our theories of knowledge and morality is a focus of this discussion, as we seek to further understand the connections between our *biology* and our *culture*. Such understandings, this chapter argues, should sit well beside those that have shaped us into the modern beings we have become, where the cultural practices, art, music, literature, and everything that our humanistic traditions have so far cultivated and valued continue to give meaning to our lives.

A naturalistic approach to the study of our 'human nature' may also explain how we are capable of turning a primitive biological concern with self-preservation into an expanded morality that accounts for altruism, humaneness and compassion, as the debate on the roots of our 'moral sense', or 'innate morality' and its possible implications by different scientists and philosophers continues. It is ultimately in our conscious mind that our rationality and our individual agency reside, and where our sense of selfhood emerges, enhanced by our symbolic language, our self-awareness, our emotions, and our sociality. This may be the source too, as the most recent studies conducted by the likes of Antonio Damasio, Edelman and Tononi, Douglas Hofstadter, and Ursula Goodenough and Terrence Deacon have found, of our conscience, and our empathy. This is how, in 'an augmentation of our social heritage', we are able to couple our moral understandings and emotions with our prosocial orientation, and how we are 'led to moral experience and insight.'

Our quest for fulfilment and self-realisation should lead us, in the end, to question our assumed uniqueness as human beings. We realise that we are compelled, by virtue of our humanity, to use all our endowments and capacities and to accept responsibility, not only for our own flourishing and self-realisation, but for that of every other living organism that shares our planet. Such expanded awareness, together with a deepened perception of our 'human nature', points to a duty to act in a way that preserves and maintains our fragile environment, so that life, all life within it, can flourish. This is one of the central ideas that this chapter highlights as a final contribution, in its

broadening perspective. A call for a clearer understanding in the process of honouring and reforging our 'human nature', of reshaping it in harmony with both our biology and our culture, completes our *poietic journey* of exploration, as it envisages us humans travelling on, along a holistic, better informed and more humane path, capable of inspiring a reinvigorated ethical image of our modern selves.

Chapter One

Ethics and morality – Some definitions and early beginnings

> *Understanding the world of morality and changing it are far from incompatible tasks. The moral concepts which are objects for analysis to the philosophers of one age may sometimes be what they are partly because of the discussions by philosophers of a previous age…*

(Alasdair Macintyre, *A Short History of Ethics*)[5]

Introduction

In the turmoil of the many centuries of human existence, we have almost everywhere searched for guidance in our quest for morality. A general overview of the many systematised moral practices devised by our predecessors in the history of European thought seems to suggest that while there are many and important guiding principles to be derived from some, or perhaps all, of these ways of creating a coherent society, no one moral system can claim exclusivity, and none has per se attracted unquestioned allegiance.

The variety of cultural norms that we humans have devised to guide our behaviour have proved to be useful for the particular times and the particular kinds of society that conceived them, as Alasdair MacIntyre has observed.[6] Our traditions, enshrined in our moral and legal codes and ways of motivating, or rewarding the 'right' behaviour towards our fellow beings and others, also suggest that these traditions could be better explained, or rather complemented, by looking back at our common, biological origins. Pursuing this line of thought as a worthy proposal for modern moral philosophy, as Kwame Anthony Appiah[7] has more recently shown, this thesis seeks to advocate further inquiry into the origins and development of our morality and the possible concordances between our evolutionary and our cultural histories that may account for the way in which we have come to acquire our ethical commitments.

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[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, p.3
[6] 'Moral philosophies, however they may aspire to achieve more than this, always do articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoint.' Alasdair MacIntyre, 1985, *After Virtue*, p.268
[7] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, *Experiments in Ethics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England. Appiah develops this proposal more fully in chapter 4 of this work, 'The Varieties of Moral Experience'

While such an investigation is fundamental for a fuller appreciation of our human complexity, the 'human nature' that we constantly strive to define and remodel, whatever new knowledge such an enterprise may provide is not seen *by itself* to ever account for any set of values that we may come to endorse as a society at any given time. Whether we think of ourselves as principally biological or social, cultural, intellectual, materialistic or spiritual beings, or we identify with all of these definitions, each of us is free to determine what we value; in other words, each of us is responsible for our own *ethical stance.* Though constrained and influenced by the prevailing cultural mores and expectations that shape communal moral practices, our ethics develop by contrast as a result of a rather more internalised, reflective process, intuited as principles that determine what we most deeply think of ourselves, how we define our humanity and justify the choices we make as we lead our lives.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is therefore that a fuller understanding of *all* that we have come to think of as 'human', of what characterises our feelings and emotions, our actions and behaviour, is crucially important in enabling us to determine what we value, in defining our ethical stance. It is only by honouring our evolving 'human nature', seen through the dual lens of its culture and its biology, in a dynamic perspective, that our own ethical principles can be determined, and our moral selves can emerge. As we define ourselves in this light, deploying our rationality as well as our emotions, as autonomous, sentient beings, the sense of worth for our own self begins to be contemplated too in relation to others around us and wherever sentient beings may be present in the world. In the measure in which we are capable of true reflection and understanding, we will then feel compelled to regard these fundamental values as worthy of preserving for all; we can thus be seen to justify *universalising* the best of these multidisciplinary and interrelated understandings in our contemporary lives. This is the path to morality and ethical realisation that this thesis attempts to trace as we follow the complex story of how we in the West have conceived the capacities and endowments of our 'human nature'.

Following this thinking does not in any way commit us to any one particular *system* of morality that either imposes a kind of generalised normativity, or attempts to 'freeze' what we at any given time consider our 'human nature' to be - but neither does it advocate a free for all relativity concerning human acts and behaviour. The thread that

connects the classical notions that the thesis invokes as the earliest attempts to define the principles that can guide us to thriving and 'faring well' in our lives, is also seen here as a poietic forging and re-creation, an enterprise in which we modern humans have a part, as we too strive to re-examine and interpret the past, to define 'what we value' in our lives, to construct our own justification for our own contemporary actions and behaviours, and to dream of a better future. What this thesis argues is important for us to keep in sight as we reflect on how to live our lives is best encapsulated in what Timothy Chappell[8] calls an 'ethical perspective' or an '*ethical outlook*' that encompasses principles that each of us, as contemporary human beings, can regard as essential to our 'flourishing' and living well.

1.1   Ethics and morality in the poiesis of 'human nature'

Bernard Williams'[9] reservations regarding moral systems in Western thought, as he doubted that any one could unequivocally succeed in guiding our motivation or justifying our decisions for action, seem to be amply justified if we look at the current debates in our legal systems on such complex issues as for instance, euthanasia, abortion, suicide, and in any other matters where normativity is enforced or expected, whether by tradition or law. More often than not, the rights of those whose fundamental means of existence are threatened - such as the poor and disenfranchised of this world, the infirm, the aged, those orphaned or seeking asylum, to name but a few - are questioned and often redefined, in a process that aims to 'normalise' prevailing attitudes in public debate, in order to justify certain political actions. In such situations, increasingly common in our globalised world, the attempt to systematise such overwhelming human complexity does not always follow what we could describe as 'pure' moral imperatives, inevitably ending up caught in a web of political or economic considerations, far removed from what we would call the realm of the ethical, refashioned and 'justified' in expedient new laws and regulations.[10]

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[8] Timothy Chappell, 2009, *Ethics and Experience: Life Beyond Moral Theory*, Acumen Publishing Limited, Durham, UK

[9] Bernard Williams, 1985/2006, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Fontana Press, Routledge, London and New York

[10] We only have to point to the unsavoury positions that Labour here in Australia has been forced into, or some would say, seems to have rather cornered itself into, from the time that the Opposition maneuvered its way into power under John Howard to date, to realise how public morality can be prosecuted for political ends.

The ongoing '*poiesis*' that imbues our human narrative, as this thesis would like to view the continual struggle to define, and also to harness the best of our human capacities and potential, is filled with a yearning towards completeness and fulfilment, even though the impetus towards action is often misguided, a function of our human and therefore contradictory nature. Given the thesis' central concern with the idea of human flourishing, it strongly suggests that some of the more enduring principles that we consider important to achieve human happiness and fulfilment can be better understood through a deeper and more inclusive glance at our complex intellectual legacy. This is the reason to focus, in the latter part of the thesis, on some contemporary social theories as well as on some of the more recent advances of the new sciences, particularly evolutionary biology and neurobiology, in order to assess their contributions to our cultural and biological evolution.

Individual human behaviour was first regulated and shaped within the earliest social groupings, the family, the clan, as a social mechanism for group coherence. This is also where the earliest manifestations of our human language, perhaps the most important of our human traits appeared, and where our intellectual, and spiritual, creativity found their expression, where the first human traditions began. Our ideals and ideas, our literature, our music, our art, and our poetry, can all be seen as longings and aspirations for better ways of living, some deepening our awareness, others exhorting us to novel ways of conducting human affairs. They are all the traces of the cultural legacy that we have inherited; the traditions that are also responsible for shaping us into the increasingly sophisticated and deeply social creatures of today.

But we also know, just by looking at the continuous political and economical struggles around the world for justice, for recognition, for land, for equality, for environmental sustainability, that we have a long way to go to realise the full promise of our humanity. If we believe, like Williams, that other people's welfare, the requirements of justice, and other things 'have value', we will understand how, as he puts it, even though we may take up the perspective of looking at what happens in the world from the outside, in order for that ethical point of view that regards people as valuable to exist, 'people's dispositions' are in some sense 'the ultimate supports of ethical value.' If we concur with this, the practical and metaphysical significance of regarding the preservation of ethical value, which according to Williams 'lies in the

reproduction of ethical dispositions'[11], is made clear. We will then perhaps feel that it is up to us to redefine our goals and re-direct our behaviour in order to, if need be, reshape our all too human nature, and realise its potential for goodness, truth and authenticity.

Authenticity, the ideal of 'being true to oneself', is seen by Charles Taylor as the moral ideal of self-fulfilment. This ideal is guided by a picture of what 'a better or higher mode of life would be, where "better" and "higher" are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer *a standard* of what we ought to desire.'[12] Taylor has a more extensive elaboration of these ideas in his influential 1989 *Sources of the Self,* which he revisited in the more recent *A Secular Age.*[13] Both of these works affirm that human beings are naturally moral, and that this 'higher' mode of life offers us the wholeness that we seek for self-fulfilment in our lives. In the same spirit as Taylor, this thesis maintains that the innate moral sense that we would also see as prevailing in humans to guide their actions is also a product of our human reasoning. Enhanced by self-reflection and imagination, this 'moral sense' may thus account for the ethical stance that encompasses the 'right' attitude and behaviour towards other non-human sentient beings and extends beyond our immediate environment.

The notion that we can use our rationality to uphold our moral standards is something that Alasdair MacIntyre has also been advancing in his neo-Aristotelian approach to ethics.[14] But an important debate about the precise *kind* of reason we are appealing to when this term is invoked has been opened up, among others, by Timothy Chappell, as he argues persuasively for an *ethical outlook*, very much as Taylor does, which encapsulates 'a set of views and commitments about the central questions concerning

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[11] Bernard Williams, 1985/2006, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chapter 3, 'Foundations: Well-Being', p.51
[12] Charles Taylor, 1991, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, p.16. Emphasis added. The idea of 'higher' or 'hyper' goods is one dear to Taylor, as most of his writing illustrates.
[13] Charles Taylor, 1989, *Sources of the Self: The Making of a Modern Identity*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts) and 2007, *A Secular Age*, (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England). The work of the late Bernard Williams, 1985/2006, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, that of Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, *Experiments in Ethics*, and of Timothy Chappell, 2009, *Ethics and Experience: Life Beyond Moral Theory,* start off the ongoing discussion that is the background of this thesis. However, much is owed primarily, as mentioned in the general Introduction, to Charles Taylor's study, *Sources of the Self* and to Alasdair MacIntyre's work on ethics, for inspiring the initial framework of this thesis, which draws on what amounts to a history of ideas, and branches off to explore and expand productively on some of the avenues intimated in these works.
[14] See especially Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* Second Edition, (Duckworth, London, 1985); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); and *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1967/2006)

value.' These questions are ultimately concerned, as Chappell defines them, with:

…what is worth living for and what is worth dying for; what is really admirable and what is really contemptible; what we must do at all costs and what we must not do no matter what; and so on. This set of views and commitments need not be very explicit; but it must run deep – must be sincerely and indeed passionately held. And it need not be very systematic; but it must be as considered, rationally defensible and coherent as possible. Any such set of views about value is what I shall call an *ethical outlook*.[15]

The question of *value* is inevitably implicated in any definition of morality, ethics or moral systems, understood as a regulative or normative element. However, as Chappell suggests, value, or more precisely, *what we value*, need not, cannot even, be captured by any one moral system. It must be, nevertheless, 'rationally defensible', and 'sincerely and passionately held.' These are important points for this thesis to engage with and expand upon in the course of its exposition.

There have been many ways of conceiving morality throughout Western history, mostly a task that has befallen, though not exclusively, to philosophers. Stan van Hooft claims that morality 'tells us what we ought to do in a specific range of circumstances', although he qualifies this statement by saying that the justification of our moral norms 'must be sensitive to what we are as human beings', granting that we may often act more influenced by our emotions than by our reason – in which case 'it might be best not to posit pure reason as the basis or our norms' – another important point that this thesis will also be taking up. Van Hooft's main concern is virtue ethics, which he considers an important strand within moral theory, contrasting it with a deontological approach to morality.[16] Williams, nevertheless, makes an important distinction between ethics and morality throughout his work, and he, like Chappell, MacIntyre and Appiah, have an undisputedly equal and deep regard for moral philosophy.

For Williams, the concerns outlined above unquestionably belong within the province of moral philosophy, regarding the Socratic question of how should one live as 'the

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[15] Timothy Chappell, 2009, *Ethics and Experience: Life Beyond Moral Theory*, p.195
[16] Stan van Hooft, 2006, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*, Acumen Publishing Limited, Chesham, Bucks, UK, pp.2-4

best place for moral philosophy to start.'[17] Socrates' question demands a reflection on one's life 'as a whole', which in the end may be the same as a question about *the good life*, a life worth living, but one which Williams believes that *in itself* 'does not bring in any distinctively moral claims.' There is therefore in this view, a clear distinction between morality 'as a system', and ethical behaviour:

Many philosophical mistakes are woven into morality. It misunderstands obligations, not seeing how they form just one type of ethical consideration. It misunderstands practical necessity, thinking it peculiar to the ethical. It misunderstands ethical practical necessity, thinking it peculiar to obligations. Beyond all this, morality makes people think that, without its very special obligation, there is only inclination; without its utter voluntariness, there is only force; without its ultimately pure justice, there is no justice.[18]

While decrying the manner in which morality has been represented, or misrepresented by philosophy, Williams nevertheless pays homage to this 'peculiar institution', which he admits is 'a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life.' Michael Ruse too claimed at one point that 'morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes.'[19] In another facet of this argument however, it may very well turn out to be that, rather than undermining morality, we owe our moral intuitions, as Richard Joyce believes, precisely to our evolutionary past.[20]

At the root of most of the theories concerned with morality, there is an attempt to find explanations for why we human beings should be moral, as well as accompanying reasons to justify what is seen as moral principles to guide human behaviour. These questions are steeped in complexity, as are those concerning normativity and prescription, evaluation and judgement, justification and value. Linked as they are to the way we organise societies, to the political ethos that underlies their construction, they also point to the inevitable conflict of opinions as to how this is best accomplished.

'Moral concepts are embodied in and are partially constitutive of forms of social life',

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[17] Bernard Williams, 1985/2006, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* p.4
[18] *Ibid*, p.196
[19] Michael Ruse, 1986, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, Blackwell, p.253, quoted in Richard Joyce, 2006, 'Introduction', *The Evolution of Morality*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, p.2
[20] Richard Joyce, 2006, *The Evolution of Morality*, passim. Ruse would certainly agree with Joyce, as will be evident from the discussion in the last chapter of this thesis.

to quote MacIntyre again regarding this complexity.[21] The link between pre-modern and contemporary ways of approaching such questions may be clearer when we realise that morality for the first Greek philosophers was inextricably bound with the idea of obligation on how to act. Similarly, nearly all modern moral philosophers recognise that 'the results of human actions and attitudes are implied in the awareness of every ought.'[22] From the time of the first Greek philosophers, ethics, Vernon Bourke tells us, had but one meaning: 'it is the reflective study of what is good or bad in that part of human conduct for which man has some *personal responsibility*.'[23]

It is the diversity of positions of what can be interpreted as 'good or bad', or other evaluative terms, that ethics is principally concerned with. Most moral systems in Western democracies are seen to revolve around a basic notion arising from the classical concept of *the good*, understood as both Plato and Aristotle did, as fundamental for human beings to live well and to flourish. The re-emergence of 'virtue ethics' in various studies that invoke the idea of 'the good' as a component of human morality, stress the relevance of these ancient conceptions of 'human nature' to a deeper understanding of truth and authenticity in contemporary life.[24]

This chapter links this ancient notion, as it arises in Greek classical civilisation, with our current understanding of what it means to be a responsible moral agent acting in the world, or what we now know as *a self*. This notion suggests a path for human beings to follow if they are to flourish, to thrive, or to 'fare well' as they partake of the unfolding *poiesis* of their 'human nature'.

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[21] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, p.2

[22] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, *History of Ethics, Volume I, Graeco-Roman to Early Modern Ethics,* Axios Press, Mount Jackson, VA, pp.8-9

[23] *Ibid,* p.9. Emphasis added

[24] This area of research includes authors such as Charles Guignon *On Being Authentic*, Routledge, London, 2004; Stan van Hooft, the Associate Professor of Philosophy at Deakin University and author of *Understanding Virtue Ethics: Eudaimonia'* (Acumen Publishing Limited, Chesham, Bucks., UK, 2006); A.C. Grayling, *What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live,* (Phoenix, Orion Books Ltd., London, 2004); Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life,* (Routledge, London and New York, 2003); and Simon Blackburn's *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics,* (Oxford University Press, 2001). A recent addition along these lines has also come from the 2006 Massey Lectures, 'The Ethical Imagination', presented by Margaret Somerville, and published by Melbourne University Press in 2007, under the same title. Timothy Chappell traces the philosophical development of an ethical notion of the self in *The Inescapable Self: An Introduction to Western Philosophy since Descartes*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), and in his more recent book, *Ethics and Experience: Life Beyond Moral Theory* where, as discussed, he develops many of the insights that are very much in line with some of the main arguments of this thesis. Mark Vernon's *Wellbeing* (Acumen Publishing Limited, Stocksfield, UK, 2008) is a similarly valuable contribution.

1.2   Classical understandings of 'the good life'

You are an Athenian. Your city is the most important and renowned for its wisdom and power; so are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honour and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?[25]

The concern for 'the state of one's soul' has passed on to us in the writings of Plato, Socrates' famous disciple. The term *soul* can be seen in a broader reading as an awareness of some interiority or some moral dimension, which in our times has been commonly thought of as *the self*. That we should have come to think of ourselves in this light lies at the heart of our ethical concerns. The preoccupation with the care of the soul, a Socratic prerequisite for living well, would become a dominant idea in Western philosophy, whether expressed in theistic or secular representations.

The ancient Greek philosophers placed 'man' at the centre of their known universe, encouraging moral striving in all their endeavours, as a mark of their society's ethos. Protagoras, one of the earliest Greek philosophers, thus claimed that 'man is the measure of all things.' Classical Greek thought was, according to Grayling, 'the first fully recorded enlightenment in the history of humanity',[26] and its discussion of the good life is also the source of all ethical inquiry in Western history since. But the economies of the Greek city-states were based on slavery and war, and women were excluded from full citizenship; while this world was far from ideal by modern standards, there was nevertheless a deep engagement in such a society among the privileged male elite, the rulers and philosophers of the time, into vital matters that still concern us in our day:

When viewed in general terms as an ethos, the Greek view of life appears at its best in its appreciation of beauty, the respect it paid to reason and the life of reason, its freedom of thought and feeling, its absence of mysticism and false sentimentality, and its humanism, pluralism and sanity of outlook – which taken all together, specifies living nobly and richly in spirit as the aim of life.[27]

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[25] From *Defence of Socrates, Euthyphro*, translated by David Gallop, Oxford University Press, 1997, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, Second edition, Oxford University Press, p.25, 29a
[26] A.C. Grayling, 2004, *What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live,* p.9
[27] *Ibid*, p.11

Reflecting on the importance for the rulers of his ideal city to conform to the principles of justice, Socrates emphasised the relevance of living honourably or justly to the idea of living well.[28] Life's most important project, he claimed, was the care of one's own soul, and central to this quest was an understanding of truth and how to live it. The Socratic dialogues, as Plato recorded them, have thus become a model of what it means to lead a 'good life.' Socratic well-being, (*eudaimonia*) consists in the actual doing of what is good. This is a dynamic theory of happiness and moral success. To do good (*eu-prattein*) is to fare well. Socrates avoided offering a formal standard for the determination of what is good, but insisted that earnest discussion and reflection could discover the ideals of temperate, just, and courageous living.[29]

We are informed of Socrates' teachings and personal philosophy only through Plato, one of his most admiring disciples, who was deeply interested not only in questions of morality, but also in politics, and in literary pursuits. Some of the things that Plato includes in the dialogues may suggest that Socrates' views, or Plato's perhaps, were anti-democratic, but the genuine concerns in these writings with issues of justice and morality and the repeated inquiries into these matters are an important contribution to the question of how life should be lived for any contemporary society.

Plato's idealisation of truth and knowledge

In Book VI of *The Republic*, Socrates begins an account of the existence of a 'multiplicity of things that are beautiful, and good,'[30] with which we are led into the realm of Platonic ideas. The light of the sun is for Socrates a metaphor to talk about with something that the soul can only apprehend: the invisible power of true our ability to appreciate that which is visible, or appears to us as real in this world, knowledge, the realm of the Forms, wherein the notions of beauty, truth and goodness are contained.

There has been much discussion of what exactly Plato means by the Forms. Plato also

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[28] From Book I, *The Republic*, translation revised by Andrea Tschemplik, 2000, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.63, 352 d
[29] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, *History of Ethics, Volume I, Graeco-Roman to Early Modern Ethics*, Axios Press, Mount Jackson, VA, p.23
[30] From Book VI, *The Republic*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.99-103

develops in this work the image of the Line, alongside with that of the Cave. The Line is divided horizontally; below the division lie the realms of imagining and perceiving, while above lie those of mathematical entities and of the Forms. These divisions are to be understood as 'the four dispositions of the soul', namely, understanding, reasoning, trust and imagination.[31]

In Socrates' familiar allegory, the cave - with the shadows that its dwellers can perceive inside while unable to turn towards the light of the sun - is a place that is clearly in contrast with the idealised realm that the Forms constitute, where truth and knowledge reside.[32] The 'idea of the good' is first partially explained by Socrates in the same allegory, as linked to, but distinct from knowledge and truth, while 'the having of the good' is here regarded as 'still more honourable.'[33] The meaning of the upward and outward ascent from the cave and the contemplation of the things above can be interpreted as a symbolic journey from seeing particular things to seeing the eternal realities, or 'forms' of which the particulars are mere shadow-like copies. The 'journey of the soul into the intelligible region' has thus as its aim the full apprehension of 'the essential idea of the good.'[34]

The whole of this particular discussion, like most in *The Republic*, has the purpose of describing what is required of all individuals to understand and practise what 'the idea of the good' entails, but particularly for those individuals whom Plato believes can become the ideal Guardians of the city, ruling out those who are 'uneducated and ignorant of truth', as well as those concerned only with educating themselves.[35] The reason advanced for excluding the latter shows Plato's beliefs for the foundation of true democracy, even though he also believed that 'in all likelihood, democracy, and only democracy, lays the foundation of tyranny - that is to say, the most intense freedom lays the foundation for the heaviest and the fiercest slavery'[36] This pronouncement may be explained by remembering Plato's disenchantment with the

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[31] *Ibid*, pp.102-3, 509, b-e
[32] The release of the prisoners from the underground, cave-like chamber brings each of them in the presence of the dazzling light of the sun. However, without a gradual exposure to this light, the prisoner, like any human being until then 'chained' by their own ignorance and deceived by appearances - the 'shadows' that he perceives while in the cave - will not be able to 'see the light' before him.
[33] From Book VI, *The Republic*, p.101, 509
[34] *Ibid*, p.105, 516 b-c
[35] *Ibid*, p.106, 519 c
[36] From Book VIII, *The Republic*, p.109, 564

politics of his time. However, fearful as he was of the tyranny of Sparta[37], he still seems to believe that genuine lawmakers will enable the whole city to 'live extraordinarily well', placing upon these rulers the 'additional obligation of guarding and caring for the others.'[38]

In Plato's philosophy, two distinct principles are always in tension in the human soul: one is the part of the soul 'with which it reasons', the rational principle, and the other, that part 'with which it loves and hungers and thirsts, and experiences the flutter of the other desires', the irrational and appetitive principle. To these two Plato added what he called 'the spirited principle', which he explains as a third element, and 'the natural ally of the rational principle', which refers to the combative and competitive part of 'human nature.' These principles combine to make the virtuous and courageous individual, and it is these same principles that also apply to the rulers of the ideal city described in *The Republic*. Thus the higher part of the soul rules over the lower, which is the realm of desire, where we indulge in earthly appetites, and also of chaos; the rational part of the soul is naturally inclined towards harmony, order and concord - all attributes that the good soul enjoys.[39]

In the *Phaedo,* which describes the conversation that took place between Socrates and his students on the day of his death, the notion of *living honourably* or justly is also inextricably bound with the idea of what could now be described as the 'immortality of the soul.'[40] The soul can have knowledge of the idealised 'forms' that the allegory of the cave describes through reason and recollection, or '*anamnesis.*' This could in turn be seen as a proof of the immortality of the soul, for the soul must have been in the eternal realm of the Forms before its birth into this world.[41]

Plato also claimed that the soul is 'unextended', setting it aside from the world of

[37] In his excellent essay on Socrates, Anthony Gottlieb makes reference to the twenty-seven year war between Athens and Sparta, which had ended in the defeat of Athens. This event took place in 404 BC, five years before Socrates' trial. It was not until 401 BC that democracy was fully restored in Athenian society, which explains the feelings of insecurity among its citizens. (Anthony Gottlieb, 'Socrates: Philosophy's Martyr', in Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael (eds.), *The Great Philosophers: From Socrates to Turing*, Phoenix, London, 2000, pp. 12-13.

[38] From Book VII, *The Republic*, pp.106-7, 519 b

[39] From Book IV, *The Republic*, pp.91-92, 439-440

[40] Philosopher Raymond Martin and psychologist John Barresi claim that the discussion is reportedly the first argument in the West to explicitly question the immortality of the soul. (Martin, Raymond, and Barresi, John, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006, pp.14-15)

[41] Mel Thompson, 2003, *Philosophy*, Hodder & Stoughton Education, London, pp.25-6

physical things that are potentially divisible, and hence potentially corruptible. This is the manner in which he was interpreted in the second century by leading Neoplatonists.[42] It was based on Plato's conviction that the soul was *essentially* alive, and that on the approach of death, it simply withdrew. Apart from the many resonances between the manner in which Plato describes the division between the soul and the body, there is the unmistakable reference to the rewards that a soul who lives a virtuous life can expect: the promise of an afterlife, where the soul will enjoy the fruits of moral conduct denied on this earth. It is this conception that seems to have passed into Christianity, and which, in a modified form, survives today as a justification of the soul's immortality.[43]

Reason and self-mastery in Platonic thinking

Plato's vision for the establishment of a guardian class to rule over his ideal city contained the virtues that its rulers should have: wisdom, prudence, courage and temperance, and justice.[44] These were the exemplary qualities that the rulers should possess and, similarly, so should the city. Courage is seen as 'a kind of safe keeping',[45] while temperance 'has more the appearance of a concord or harmony, than the former qualities had.' Socrates then introduces the notion which is now familiar to us, linking temperance with justice and 'self-mastery':

Temperance is, I imagine, a kind of order and a mastery, as men say, over certain pleasures and desires. Thus we plainly hear people talking of a man being master of himself, in some sense or other; and other similar expressions are used, in which we may trace a print of the thing.[46]

Socrates continues to explain that 'in the man himself, that is, in his soul, there resides a good principle and a bad' and when the naturally good principle prevails over the bad, 'this state of things is described by the term "master of himself": certainly [it is] a term of praise.' But should the bad principle prevail, the result would turn man into

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[42] It is this view of the soul to which René Descartes would also subscribe toward the beginning of the seventeenth century, and which gave rise to the modern dualism with which many thinkers have engaged since.
[43] As Martin and Barresi point out, 'it was not Plato's arguments for immortality but rather his conception of the soul as immaterial, simple, and thereby naturally immortal that turned out to be so enormously influential.' (Martin, R. and Barresi, J., 2006, p.16)
[44] Confucius, we may recall, made a similar pronouncement on the rule by 'wise men' in his teachings.
[45] From Book IV, *The Republic*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp. 83-84, 429-30
[46] *Ibid,* p.85

'a slave of self, and a dissolute person.'[47]

Socrates thus connects a man's ability to behave according to the virtues, 'keeping the harmony of the body in tune', with the constant aim 'to preserve the harmonic symphony which resides in the soul.'

In this dialogue, Glaucon, his student, raises one more objection about the possibility of living according to the principles that Socrates has explained at length. He doubts that this ideal city, planned in such detail, and 'confined to the region of speech', is to be found anywhere on earth. Socrates replies with what seems to be a non-refutable argument:

Well, I said, perhaps in heaven there is laid up a pattern of it for him who wishes to behold it, and, beholding, to organize himself accordingly. And the question of its present or future existence on earth is quite unimportant. For in any case he will adopt the practices of such a city, to the exclusion of those of every other.[48]

The Platonic legacy

Most of the ideas that Socrates conveyed to his disciples have survived from Plato's time into our own. Self-mastery is still considered something worth striving towards, even among our contemporaries. But Socrates is also clearly concerned with the need to answer the question about the value of justice 'in itself', as Bernard Williams observes, in his reading of Plato.[49] A just person is one in whom reason rules, and a just city is one that is governed by just people: those who will have balance and stability in their soul and who will themselves be guided by their own understanding of justice and of the good. The authority of reason is thus represented politically by the unquestioned authority of a class of 'Guardians' who have been educated in philosophy.

Although the foundation of a just city seems to be the answer to the question of how

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[47] *Ibid*

[48] From Book IX, *The Republic*, *i*n Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.129

[49] Bernard Williams, 'The Ethical Challenge, Plato: The Invention of Philosophy', in Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael (eds.), 2001, *The Great Philosophers*, Phoenix, an imprint of Orion Books Ltd., London, UK, p.72

to keep justice alive, even in *The Republic* Plato is aware that in practice no earthly institution can remain exempt of corruption. Even if we imagine the city coming about, it will ultimately degenerate, as Plato feared. The story that we find here about the effects of the ethical degeneration among individual people continues to be a source for a good deal of social and psychological reflection.

The answer with which Plato ends the last Book of *The Republic* has been rightly found wanting, as will be clear from the quote that closes the previous section. In the light of what Plato proposes for his ideal city, we can ask with MacIntyre, 'What, then, is the philosopher who has ascended to the Forms to do? It will only be at the rarest moments in history, and possibly it will never happen at all, that he will have the possibility of intervening to create the just state.'[50] Plato would answer that even if the ideal state can never become real, it can provide a standard for what we want to see happen in political life.

If we attempt to interpret Plato's formulations in *The Republic* in our own terms, in trying to extract Plato's philosophy from his writings, some obvious complications arise. The first, as Williams points out, is the uncertainty that attaches to the concerns that Plato ascribes to Socrates, the real historical figure, and to Plato's own, given what we have come to know about each of these men. What may be the most famous of Plato's dialogues, the *Phaedo,* the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*, have helped to form the traditional picture of 'the Platonic philosophy', one that contrasts with the everyday physical world of appearance, a realm of intellectual, eternal objects - the objects of real knowledge that can be attained by the immortal soul. There are, nevertheless, suggestions that Plato had become convinced that there were deep difficulties with the 'theory of the Forms', and that he expressed these in later dialogues, and particularly in the *Parmenides*.[51]

Perhaps one of the strongest objections against Plato's philosophy, particularly as it appears in *The Republic*, is best summed up by MacIntyre, who sees in Plato a determination 'to uphold a paternalistic and totalitarian politics', clearly independent

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[50] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006 'Plato: The *Republic*', in *A Short History of Ethics*, p.43
[51] Bernard Williams, 'Plato's Development, Plato: The Invention of Philosophy', in Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael (eds.), 2001, pp.54-55

of any particular version of the theory of Forms, and long after he had abandoned the version which in *The Republic* helps to sustain such views.'[52] One could perhaps judge Plato's views as simply inconsistent, or a product of subsequent reflection, and MacIntyre's harsh judgement of Plato's political philosophy may be partly justified. But MacIntyre is clearly no Platonist, as his writings in defence of the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues testify.

Apart from the tensions that the various approaches to the Forms must create, Williams finds logic and semantic problems in the detailed metaphysics of the *Republic*, regarding the worlds of appearance and reality.[53] But the main concerns, as he examines the oppositions between eternal reality and the illusions of the changing material world, are made not only from the perspective of philosophical theory. The point, he tells us, is that these oppositions 'defeated Plato's ethical purposes.' One of the questions that remain unanswered with the idea put forward in the *Republic* is one of motivation, and ultimately, of what is achieved with Plato's theory; or what is in the end its purpose, or justification. Plato thinks that it is better that the just and wise should rule unwillingly, rather than those who actually want power should have it. This is what he envisages of the Guardians of the city, that 'each of them will undertake ruling as an unavoidable duty.'[54] Inasmuch as Plato's Guardians, in being required to rule, are displaced from the world or sentenced to it, we feel that this is not an adequate conception of the best rulers of society, nor that it satisfies society's need for justice.[55]

A similar outlook, Williams believes, also emerges in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates asserts that it is better to have injustice done to one than to do injustice, for the good man 'cannot be harmed.' The only thing that really matters then is virtue, and the virtue of a good man is inviolate against the assaults of the world. If this is right, we may ask why we then suppose that it matters whether other people's bodies and

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[52] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Plato: The *Republic*', in *A Short History of Ethics*, p.54
[53] Williams refers here to Plato's *Sophist*, where we are told that Plato explores with very great care the complex relations between five particularly abstract concepts, which he calls 'the greatest kinds' rather than Forms – being, sameness, difference, motion and rest – and reaches subtle conclusions about the ways in which they apply to each other and to themselves. In this work, Plato apparently invests powerful instruments for solving the logical and semantic problems that underlie some of the central formulations of the *Republic*. Bernard Williams, 'The Ethical Challenge, Plato: The Invention of Philosophy', in Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael (eds.), 2001, *The Great Philosophers*, pp.81-82
[54] From Book VII, *The Republic*, In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, *Ethics*, p.107, 520e.
[55] Bernard Williams, 'Plato's Philosophy and the Denial of Life, Plato: The Invention of Philosophy', pp.83-84

possessions are assaulted or appropriated. We all presumably know that this does matter, and is central to our conception of justice. The tension that surfaces with this apparent contradiction 'leaves an impossible gap between the motivations that it offers for an ethical life, and what one is supposed to do if one leads it.'[56]

It is Plato's apparent lack of concern for what happens to real people in the material world that seems equally contradictory. His will to transcend mortal life, to reach for a higher state of knowledge and truth is part of the traditional image of his philosophy and is one element that is also contrasted between him and the more empirically rooted Aristotle. But Plato is not always drawing us beyond the concerns of the world, as Williams concedes. In the *Symposium* in particular, 'the picture really is of ascent, and the material world is seen with the light behind it, giving an image not of failure and dereliction but of promise.'

Plato's philosophy hoped to change one's life through theory, and Williams gives us a thoughtful evaluation of this philosophy.[57] Plato's dialogues are never closed or final. There are in them theoretical discussions, often very complex, subtle and original; there are also many statements of how our lives need to be changed and of how philosophy may help to change them. Williams' essay began by quoting a passage from the *Phaedrus*, which he claims is true to Plato's outlook. It seems to assert that what most importantly might come from philosophy cannot be written down, that the final significance of philosophy for one's life emerges rather from its activities. As Socrates put it:

… there is a much finer concern about these things – that of someone who uses the art of dialectic, and takes a suitable soul and plants and sows discourse accompanied with knowledge: discourse which is capable of helping itself and the sower, which is not barren but produces a seed from which other

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[56] *Ibid,* p.84

[57] 'Granted the distrust and even the rejection of the empirical world which do play a significant role in his outlook; granted too, the fact that his politics are far removed from any that could serve us now, not only in time but by an unashamedly aristocratic temperament; we may ask how his dialogues can remain so vividly alive. They are, indeed, sometimes sententious, and Socrates speaking on behalf of virtue can be tiring and high-minded, just as his affection of ignorance and simplicity, the famous 'irony', can be irritatingly coy. But their faults are almost always those of a real person. They speak with a recognizable human voice, or more than one, and they do not fall into the stilted, remote complacency or quaint formalism to which most philosophy is so liable. In part this is because of the dialogue form. In part, it is because (as Nietzsche's remark implies) Plato is constantly aware of the forces – of desire, of aesthetic seduction, of political exploitation – against which his ideals are a reaction.' *Ibid,* p.88

discourse grows in other lives, and in turn can go on to make the seed immortal, making the man who has it as happy as any man can be.[58]

1.3   Aristotelian thought and 'the good for man'

Aristotle seems to have followed Plato in assuming that the part of the soul able to think rationally, which he called *nous*, is immortal. In his early writings, he also seems to have taken a Platonic view of 'human nature', stating that the real human is simply the incorporeal soul, and that the body is at best an instrument of the soul and at worst its prison or mortal tomb.[59] Later on, in *De Anima* and elsewhere, his statements are enigmatic. What is clear is that, whereas Plato believed in the material, or visible reality and the immaterial, or invisible, for Aristotle there is only one world, and everything in it is material. It is the relation of human beings to this world that most concerns Aristotle, as his writings show.

In Aristotle's thinking, the idea of the good for human beings is best described by the term *eudaimonia*.[60] This term, often translated as happiness, contains not just the notion of behaving well, but also of *faring well*. Aristotle's use of this word reflects the strong Greek sense that virtue and happiness cannot be entirely separated.

In his much-admired work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle sets out to define 'the good for man', the title of the treatise's first Book, as the subject of his enquiry:

[…] both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and faring well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honour; they differ, however, from one another - and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor; but, conscious of their ignorance, they admire those who proclaim some great thing that is above their comprehension. Now some thought that apart from these many goods there is another which is good in

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[58] From Plato's *Phaedrus*, 275c-277a, in Bernard Williams, 'The Ethical Challenge, Plato: The Invention of Philosophy', in Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael (eds.), 2001, p.53
[59] See Raymond Martin and John Barresi's 2006, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, for an expanded explanation of this idea in footnote 13, p.310
[60] This is a Greek word combining *eu* meaning 'good' with *daimon* meaning 'spirit'. It is most often translated as happiness.

itself and causes the goodness of all these as well.[61]

In the opening sections of this work, Aristotle begins by stating that 'all human activities aim at some good' and that for this reason 'the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.' He then claims that if there be 'some end to the things we do, which we desire for its own sake', there must be something that answers to his description of a possible supreme good. The definition of *the good* is soon linked to the object of political science, 'most truly the master art'[62]

This preoccupation led Aristotle to compose another work, *Politics*, which is presented as the sequel to the *Ethics*. Both works are concerned with the practical 'science' of human happiness. The *Ethics* shows us what form and style of life are necessary to happiness; the *Politics* what particular form of constitution, what set of institutions, are necessary to make this form of life possible and to safeguard it. Aristotle's word for 'political' covers both what we now mean by *political* and what we mean by *social*, and does not discriminate between them. The reason for this, as MacIntyre reminds us, is that in the Greek city-state, the institutions of the *polis* are both those in which policy and the means to execute it are determined, and those in which the face-to-face relationships of social life find their home. In the assembly, a citizen meets his friends, who are also fellow members of the assembly.[63] Van Hooft suggests that the different parts of this work are aimed at different audiences: the young, the mature adults and the older men - as it is mostly Greek aristocratic *men* engaged in intellectual activity that the *Ethics* addresses.[64]

Aristotle finds the relevant meaning of the notion of *the good* in the study of 'human nature' and worldly existence. In a theory that is naturalistic, he defines an understanding of things in human beings in terms of the goals that they pursue and the functions that they are designed to perform. The idea of a *telos* for human beings is to

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[61] From *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book I – The Good for Man*, 'What is the Good for Man?', translated by W.D. Ross, revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (1925; 1980). In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.131-2.4
[62] From *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book I - The Good for Man,* 'Subject of Our Inquiry' and 'The Science of the Good for Man is Politics.' In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.130-31, 1.2.
[63] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Aristotle's Ethics', in *A Short History of Ethics*, p.55
[64] In line with a contemporary preoccupation with a return to the notion of '*the good*', Stan van Hooft, conducts a very detailed analysis of Aristotelian thought and its implications for an ethical theory of the self in our contemporary life. (See Stan van Hooft, 2006, *Understanding Virtue Ethics: Eudaimonia*)

be understood simply as doing those things that are distinctly human and doing them well; that is, 'to be good as a human being.' And according to Aristotle, since human beings are animals that are distinguished from other animals in being rational, being good at being a human being consists in the exercise of rationality in actions that are rational. The rational activity that will make us happy is thus 'virtuous activity': acting in accordance with the highest form of virtue.[65]

Virtue, happiness and the human good

Aristotle's definition of happiness as 'an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue' demands that we delve further into the nature of human virtue in order to understand the nature of human happiness. As he clearly states, 'the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness.'[66] The kind of virtue that Aristotle proposes to inquire into is 'not that of the body but that of the soul.' Aristotle's use of the expression *soul* is quite different from Plato's however. For Plato, soul and body are two entities contingently and, we are given to understand, often unhappily united; even in opposition to one another. For Aristotle, the soul is form to the body's matter, and as many commentators have interpreted it, when Aristotle speaks of the soul, we can think of him as referring to what we now would call personality.[67]

Aristotle believes that the two elements in the soul, the rational and the irrational principles, account for different faculties in human beings. Unlike Plato's strict division, Aristotle tells us that '[W]hether these are separated as the parts of the body or of anything divisible, or are distinct by definition but by nature inseparable […] does not affect the present question.'[68] The irrational, or rather the non-rational part of the soul, includes the merely physiological as well as the realm of feelings and impulses. These latter can be called rational or irrational, insofar as they accord with what reason enjoins.

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[65] Stan van Hooft, 2006, *Understanding Virtue Ethics,* pp.51-52
[66] From *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book I – The Good for Man,* 'Kinds of Virtue'*,* in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.138-39, 1.3.
[67] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Aristotle's Ethics', in *A Short History of Ethics,* p.61
[68] From *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book I – The Good for Man,* 'Kinds of Virtue'*,* in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002*,* p.139, 1.3.

Virtue too is distinguished into two kinds: intellectual and moral. Wisdom and understanding and practical wisdom are examples of the intellectual virtues, while liberality and temperance exemplify the moral virtues. In Aristotle's detailed account of the virtues, the first glimpses into Aristotle's social and cultural background can be discerned from the manner in which he describes the two kinds of virtue:

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth, and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name […] is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word […] (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature.[69]

The practical aspect of Aristotle's description of the virtues has received quite a bit of attention down to our times. He believed that 'human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting excellence.' Intellectual virtue is 'in the main' the consequence of explicit instruction, while moral virtue is established by habit. This is to say that noble, good, or virtuous actions have to be performed consistently and regularly over an entire lifetime for a person to be considered good. That 'practice makes perfect' is undoubtedly so, for in Aristotle's words, 'one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.[70]

Aristotle's conviction that 'none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature', can be said to be somewhat at odds with contemporary scientific understandings of the human brain and the origins of human characteristics and endowments, and with the views of many a philosopher. While Aristotle's assertion can be challenged from a contemporary perspective, there are still unresolved aspects to this question. Whether human beings are naturally moral, whether there is something like an innate 'moral sense' that guides human behaviour, or whether this develops as a result of our cultural practices, continues to be a matter for ongoing debate.

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[69] From *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book II – Moral Virtue,* 'Moral Virtue, How Produced, in What Medium and in What Manner Exhibited', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.140
[70] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book I – The Good for Man*, 'What is the Good for Man?', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.135.,7.

In Aristotle's characterisation, the natural abilities that we are born with, such as those afforded to us by our senses, hearing, seeing and so forth, are indisputably innate; because we have them, we use them, 'but the virtues we get by first exercising them.' We therefore 'become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.' It is thus that 'states of character arise out of like activities.'[71]

While pleasure and pain are a useful guide to inculcate the virtues, the sign of the virtuous person is that they *know* how to choose among pleasure and pain. It is the matter of virtue involving choice that makes it clear that virtue cannot be either 'a passion, or a faculty.' Aristotle states that 'we have the faculties by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature.'[72] Virtuous choice is thus choice in accordance with *a mean*, a notion which, as some philosophers have recognised, is perhaps 'the single most difficult concept in the *Ethics.*[73] Aristotle attempts to define it with the opposition of vices to virtues, or excess and defect. A mean can be seen as a rule or principle of choice between two extremes, of emotion or of action. Aristotle is aware that there are many emotions and actions for which there cannot be a 'too much' or 'too little' at certain times in one's life, and he specifically allows for this. Claiming that 'virtue aims at what is intermediate', he explains:

For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate.[74]

Aristotle connects notions of failure and success, as well as praise, for anyone who

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[71] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book II – Moral Virtue*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.140-41,2.

[72] It may be a small point, but what Aristotle has claimed before is that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature. There is no denying that we are not 'made' good or bad by nature, but there is a difference here – and perhaps something has been lost in translation.

[73] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Aristotle's Ethics', in *A Short History of* Ethics, pp.62-64

[74] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book II – Moral Virtue*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p. 144, 6.

possesses a virtue in the appropriate measure that his criteria have established. This raises a further difficulty, as he states no principle that will enable us to recognise what virtues are desirable and in what precise measure; nor importantly, who is to desire them and who to praise them, and what constitutes success or failure in this scheme. We could also ask whether it is possible to have control over all our actions and emotions; what role is there for volition, rationality and free will, extending some of these thoughts.[75] The question of evaluation and judgement - a major concern that has occupied moral philosophy since Aristotle - looms large, the more Aristotle struggles to define the virtues that we are all supposed to find desirable.

MacIntyre suggests that at this point we can attempt to interpret Aristotle's principle as implicit in his examples. But the list of virtues in the *Ethics* reflects what Aristotle takes to be 'the code of a gentleman' in contemporary Greek society. Just as in analysing political institutions Aristotle treats Greek society as normative, so in explaining the virtues he treats upper-class Greek life in the same way. The virtues that Aristotle values belong to the historical period he inhabited; there is no reference, for example, to meekness, or thrift, or even, as MacIntyre remarks, an intellectual virtue such as curiosity, which Aristotle himself in fact exhibited, but that perhaps he could not have envisaged as a virtue. Socrates' defiance of the law, for example, is not something that commands Aristotle's respect, although he did have a deep respect for Plato himself. It is therefore difficult to resist the conclusion that we can see in Aristotle's table of the virtues 'a class-bound conservatism' that inevitably raises suspicion upon the doctrine of the mean.[76]

Aristotle does not in any case believe that every human action is preceded by an act of deliberation, even though he did say that man is a rational animal. He says that 'choice involves a rational principle and thought', but that not all that is voluntary is necessarily 'an object of choice.'[77] What should guide deliberation is the virtue of practical intelligence, of knowing how to apply general principles in particular situations; the ability to act so that principle will take a concrete form. This is the

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[75] Aristotle defines man as a rational animal, a statement that is eminently open to attack, without further qualifications, as did Bertrand Russell, invoking the history of human folly and irrationality. But then, so did Kant. Aristotle's statement thus opens up a relevant and still ongoing discussion.
[76] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Aristotle's Ethics', in *A Short History of Ethics*, p.65
[77] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book II – Moral Virtue*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.149.2.

virtue of prudence, 'practical wisdom', or *phronesis*, central to Aristotle's whole ethical philosophy. Prudence is the virtue which is manifested in acting, so that one's adherence to other virtues is exemplified in one's actions.[78]

The inherent goal or *telos* that our rational souls strive after is truth, but our intellect is not only concerned with truth; it is also concerned with action. The calculative part of the soul described by Aristotle is what modern philosophers have come to call 'practical reason.'[79] Just as the goal of theoretical reason is truth, the goal of practical reason is appropriate action in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. Practical reason includes our desires, but these desires must be reasonable for the actions that they motivate. Moreover, practical wisdom, Aristotle tells us, 'must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods.'[80]

While prudence or practical wisdom has the merit of enabling one to be happy, its chief merit is in being 'the quality of mind concerned with things just and noble and good for man.' Prudence also includes the idea of self-improvement, or 'self-betterment' in an ethical sense. The point of performing a given action that requires knowledge or intellectual skill requires also the knowledge of the sorts of actions or activities that are self-fulfilling.

Thus, another important concept that must be distinguished from prudence is the concept of 'wisdom' or *sophia*, which for Aristotle is 'the most finished form of knowledge.' *Sophia* is 'knowledge of those eternal things that the contemplative part of the soul concerns itself with.' Explicit and articulated, it can be understood as knowledge of the principles the following of which would make us happy. The prudent person has only 'implicit' and 'practical knowledge' of these principles. *Sophia*, wisdom, is the highest virtue of the contemplative part of the soul, and is thus concerned with the general and the universal. It consists in our being able to grasp the principles and values that arise from our natures as human and social beings, and also

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[78] In Aristotle's sense of these terms, something, like making a violin and then playing it, can illustrate their meaning. The goal of production is then the violin itself, while the action of playing it, for which it was intended, of making music and doing it well, is the activity that has its own reward - whose only goal is its own excellence in performance. (Stan van Hooft, 2006, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*, p.66)

[79] Richard Rorty's work in particular comes to mind in this respect.

[80] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Book VI, Intellectual Virtue,* 'The Chief Intellectual Virtue', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.159, 5.

to be able to live by such values.[81]

Other Aristotelian virtues that demand attention, and which anyone would find it difficult to comprehend outside Aristotle's own social context and preferences are those of 'the great-souled man' and of justice. The 'great-souled man 'claims much and deserves much.' It is particularly in relation to the notion of honour that this is the case, according to Aristotle. It is because this paragon of pride, as MacIntyre calls it, is conceived as infallible that Aristotle endows the great-souled man with all the other virtues too. He is thus essentially a member of a society of unequals. It is less clear in the *Ethics* than it is in the *Politics* that Aristotle is prepared to believe that the positive laws of existing states can be more than marginally at variance with what is fair and right. He thus claims that

The laws aim either at the common interest of all, or at the interest of those in power determined in accordance with virtue or in some such way; so that in one sense we call just anything that effects or maintains the happiness or the components of the happiness of the political community.[82]

Aristotle goes on to describe the law as enjoining virtue and forbidding vice, saying that the law has compulsive power, and 'while people hate men who oppose their impulses, even if they oppose them rightly, the law in its ordaining of what is good is not burdensome.'[83] This must remind us of Aristotle's complacency with the existing social arrangements, and as MacIntyre remarks, it is perhaps no accident that Aristotle also believed that some men were slaves by nature.

By contrast, Aristotle's inclusion of the concept of friendship as among the necessities of the man who achieves or aspires to the good is a welcome addition to his catalogue of virtues. His treatise ends in a somewhat Platonic mode, as Aristotle asserts that the whole of human life reaches its highest point in the activity of a speculative philosopher, concluding that happiness in the highest sense is in the contemplative life.

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[81] Stan van Hooft, 2006, pp.68-69
[82] MacIntyre is quoting here from Aristotle's *Politics*, 1277b, in Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006 'Aristotle's Ethics', p.76
[83] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics, Book X, Pleasure, Happiness*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.182, 9.

The ancient Greek notion of happiness was a state defined not only in relation to one's internal condition of contentment, but also by the way one actually lived one's life and the judgements others made about it. Happiness was then understood as:

> …the public condition of honour that you enjoyed by virtue of your life of virtue. To be deemed a happy man was a public judgement that others made about you just as much as it is a private judgement that you might make about yourself…Your soul is manifested in the way you act. Action is a public event. And the perfection of your action is manifest in the way you live your life.[84]

We might be tempted to discard Aristotle's conceptual scheme, linking, as he does, the notion of the virtues that bring about happiness, with the idea of *the good* in a certain kind of hierarchical social order which presupposes a view of the universe in which timeless truth is metaphysically superior to the human world of sense experience and ordinary rationality. This would amount to judging Aristotle against the background of our own values, not his, or those of the society that produced him, as MacIntyre wisely warns.

The significance of Aristotle's thought in the search for some logical parameters to re-establish the moral foundations of our contemporary selves is that it is based precisely on the idea of defining *a purpose,* but only such purpose that will satisfy the criteria for a successful realisation of the self in this world. In this sense alone, as we human beings strive for self-realisation, Aristotle's thought can be said to be as relevant today as it was in ancient Greece.

Van Hooft's description of Aristotelian wisdom as the virtue that enables true judgement of that which is not only 'good for man', but also right for all human beings, and therefore capable of being universalised in principle, is not dissimilar to the conclusion that James Rachels reaches as he addressed the perceived 'incompleteness' of virtue ethics, at least as it has been interpreted, as reliant almost exclusively on the virtuous traits of character identified by Aristotle. Rachels, like other philosophers, points to the weakness of this narrow interpretation, particularly in situations where one virtue, such as honesty, can also come into conflict with another equally desirable virtue, such as kindness, when one is faced with the need to act in

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[84] Stan van Hooft, 2006, pp. 79-80

one way or another.[85] The main point of Rachels' essay is his desire to find a total view that can accommodate '*both* an adequate conception of right action *and* a related conception of virtuous character in a way that does justice to both.'[86] The theory of virtue, Rachels suggests, could therefore be regarded as part of an overall theory of ethics, rather than as a complete theory in itself. Such an overall theory, he believes, 'might begin by taking human welfare - or the welfare of all sentient creatures, for that matter - as the surpassingly important value.' Rachels thus explains:

We might say that, from a moral point of view, we should want a society in which all people can lead happy and satisfying lives. We could then go on to consider the questions of what sorts of actions and social policies would contribute to this goal *and* the question of what qualities of character are needed to create and sustain individual lives. An inquiry into the nature of virtue could profitably be conducted from within the perspective that such a larger view would provide. Each could illuminate the other; and if each part of the overall theory has to be adjusted a bit here and there to accommodate the other, so much the better for truth.[87]

This is indeed the kind of enquiry that virtue ethics seems to be leading in our times, with revived interest in this particular domain showing promising results.[88]

1.4   The self and morality in Hellenistic thought and beyond

By the time the Roman Empire took over the dominions that Aristotle's pupil Alexander the Great had conquered, the Hellenistic Age saw Greek culture spread throughout the Mediterranean. Hellenistic philosophy fragmented into different schools influenced by Aristotle's model of the 'good life', which by now largely meant survival in a huge imperial and often corrupt system.

The decadence and corruption of the Roman Empire at the time saw in its wake a number of schools of thought emerging, but given the limitations of this study, only

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[85] From James Rachels, 'The Ethics of Virtue', *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, pp.159-179, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1978, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.693-704.
[86] James Rachels, 'The Ethics of Virtue', p.703
[87] *Ibid*, p.704
[88] One of the most recent contributions to such a revival is Kwame Anthony Appiah's 2009 *Experiments in Ethics,* acknowledged at the outset as an influence on this thesis. Appiah is Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy and the Center for Human Values at Princeton University. His work discusses the relation between empirical moral psychology and philosophical ethics, presenting valuable insights for both.

two will be mentioned below, Epicureanism and Stoicism, since each of these philosophies also offer some of the principles that can still guide us to a good life in our times.

Epicurean principles of the good life

Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul…We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it.
[…] The things which I used unceasingly to commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life.[89]

Such are the terms in which the Athenian philosopher Epicurus (341-271 BC) addresses Menoeceus at the beginning of his *Letter*. In the ethical theory that he developed, Epicurus explains that happiness or personal contentment can only be achieved in tranquillity and peace of mind - notably not by engaging with the world and being a worthy citizen, as previous notions had taught.[90]

This ethical stance involved ridding ourselves of unnecessary desires, achieving self-sufficiency, and not fearing death. Before the inevitable spread of Christianity, by the fourth century BC, Epicurus had integrated atomist metaphysics into a philosophy of life according to which pleasure is the only good, pain the only evil, and fear of death a needless source of human distress. Among the 'first principles of the good life' that Epicurus wished to communicate to his disciples was the belief 'that god is a being immortal and blessed', but he also made clear that an understanding of God did not involve assigning 'anything alien to his immortality or ill-suited to his blessedness.' He also wished his followers to have a clear understanding of death, in a passage which, in our secular times, sounds uncannily modern in its familiarity:

[B]ecome accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is

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[89] From Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains,* translated by Cyril Bailey (1926), in Steven M. Cahan and Peter Markie, 2002, p.184
[90] Dave Robinson and Judy Groves, in *Introducing Philosophy*, Richard Appignanesi, ed., 1999, Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., St. Leonards, NSW, pp.36-9

nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. So that the man speaks but idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. […] So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.[91]

The problem, Epicurus claimed, is not death, but the fear of death. Once we had a clear understanding of the four matters: God, death, pleasure and suffering, which are the roots of all our fears and desires, Epicurus believed that the truth of this understanding would free us and give us peace of mind.

The pursuit of pleasure, a notion that Epicureans are so readily associated with, had as a goal securing 'the health of one's soul.' This kind of pleasure was not based on self-indulgence, although Epicurus did not dismiss physical pleasure and well being. Pleasure in this view is 'the beginning and end of the blessed life'; it is the 'standard' against which goods are to be judged:

For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.[92]

Epicurus believed that because of 'its natural kinship to us' pleasure is good, and he rated intellectual pleasure as highly as physical pleasure. Both kinds of pleasures have to be measured relatively to one another, and judged accordingly. This is not an easy task, he recognised, since 'the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely, the bad as good.' [93] He also stressed that only 'natural and necessary' desires should be indulged, but mostly in moderation, and we know that the simple-living Epicurean communities that gathered around him occasionally held banquets too.[94]

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[91] From Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus,* in Steven M. Cahan and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.184-5
[92] *Ibid*, p. 185
[93] *Ibid*
[94] I draw on A.C. Grayling, 2004, *What is Good?,* for a better understanding of Epicurus and his philosophy, as well as that of the Stoics, whom I discuss in the next section.

Epicurus, like Aristotle, regards *prudence* as 'the beginning and the greatest good', for 'from prudence spring all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honourably and justly.' He too believes that the virtues are 'by nature' bound up with the pleasant life, and that such a life is inseparable from them. Good and evil are not given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but rather 'opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it.' It thus follows, in a claim reminiscent of Socrates, that it is 'better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason.'[95]

There are two other social values, related to pleasure, to which Epicurus attached great importance in his philosophy: justice and friendship. For Epicurus, living pleasantly means living not only prudently and honourably, but also justly, even though his view of justice is rather instrumental. Its value resides in the fact that it serves the best interests of everyone's pleasure, as a form of contract between members of a community to ensure that they do not harm or disadvantage one another. Nevertheless, he certainly gives justice a prominent place in his leading doctrines, with pronouncements such as the following:

XXXI. The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage to restrain men from harming one another and save them from being harmed.
XXXIII. Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another in any place whatever and at any time it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed.[96]

In the 'pledge of mutual advantage' that Epicurus believes is constitutive of justice, each individual stands to gain from such an arrangement, and therefore it contributes to the pleasure of each.[97] On the other hand, Epicurus does seem to qualify the requirements for justice to work within a legal framework, and we perceive in his formulations something like an awareness of the relevance of the particular social and cultural context in which laws are framed, as he cautions that these laws should only be sanctioned if they are 'of advantage for the dealings of fellow-citizens'; that is, only when and for as long as they serve this function.

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[95] From Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*, p.186
[96] From Epicurus' *Leading Doctrines*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.188
[97] We can no doubt recognise shades of Hobbsean thought in these early Epicurean formulations.

Friendship, however, is a different matter. It is not merely an instrumental good, but has intrinsic value as one of the supreme pleasures. It figures as such in Epicurus' doctrines:

XXVII. Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

XXVIII. That same conviction which has given us confidence that there is nothing terrible that lasts for ever or even for long, has also seen the protection of friendship most fully completed in the limited evils of this life.[98]

Friendship enables us to lead fulfilling and complete lives. Its pleasures derive not only from what friends can do for each other and give to each other, but in disinterested and altruistic actions. There is clearly a tension between the egoism that lies at the basis of Epicureanism, the importance of friendship and the pleasure of altruism, which later Epicureans seem to have debated extensively.[99]

Perhaps the most important contribution of Epicureanism was in the end the recognition of the will's freedom, which is central to ethics. Epicurus recognised that the universe is governed by natural laws, reasoning that since these laws are causal, it is a problem to explain how human beings can truly be moral agents, acting from free will according to choices and decisions of their own - and not causally determined by previous states of the universe. He dealt with the problem by asserting that humans have free will. It might even have been part of Epicurus' view, Grayling speculates, that the mind is governed by its own causality with laws separate to those governing the natural world, but if he did hold such a view, it 'remains a matter of scholarly interpretation.'[100]

Epicureanism remained influential in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The poets Horace and Virgil were reputedly influenced by Epicurean teachings, as was Marcus Aurelius, who established four professorships of philosophy in Rome, one for Epicureanism. Later, the attacks on the 'largely atheistic and naturalistic outlook of

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[98] From Epicurus' *Leading Doctrines*, p.188
[99] To their credit, Grayling informs us, 'none attempted to resolve it by jettisoning the idea that friendship is among the highest of goods.' A.C. Grayling,, 2004, *What is Good?,* pp.47-8
[100] *Ibid,* p.49

Epicureanism by Christians', as Grayling observes, kept the doctrine alive in the Western mind, becoming once more of interest to intelligent speculation in the Renaissance.[101] It was the somewhat degenerate popular forms of Epicureanism, with its attitudes and practices caricatured as a crude form of hedonism however, that became associated with the doctrine down to our days. The dominant school of thought before Christianity, Stoicism, would have a better fate.

Stoicism and self-possession

> You must be one man, good or bad; you must develop either your Governing Principle, or your outward endowments; you must study either your inner man, or outward things – in a word, you must choose between the position of a philosopher and that of a mere outsider.[102]

The above exhortation is characteristic of Stoic philosophy, which began early in the fourth century BC, when Zeno of Citium came to Athens to teach at a place under a porch, or *stoa*, from which came its name. Zeno wrote a number of treatises, but except for fragments in later writings, these works have been lost. Roman Stoicism belongs to a much later era, to the first and second centuries CE, with such leading figures as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.[103]

The Stoics were all inheritors of ideas developed in the classical period that preceded them. Socrates' rationality, self-mastery and the tireless search for truth had also inspired the Cynics, who were another important source of influence on Stoicism. It seems that the Cynics advocacy of cosmopolitanism, life in accordance with nature, and the supreme value of 'autarchy', understood as individual self-government, was a major influence in the development of Stoic ethics.[104]

Stoics like Cicero and Seneca shared the ideal of global citizenship and equality, and placed their faith only in reason in order to lead the good life. Grayling, as do Martin and Barresi, claims that the ethical concerns of the Stoics arise from their view of the universe as 'a single orderly system, existing in ever-returning cycles as a rational

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[101] *Ibid*
[102] From '*Epictetus: The Discourses and Manual*, 'Enchiridion', translated by P.E. Matheson (1917). In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.195
[103] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, *History of Ethics,* p.57
[104] A.C. Grayling, 2004, *What is Good?,* p.51

organisation of the four elements by *logos*, or reason.' The *logos*, variously called 'creative power,' 'soul of the world,' or 'reason,' is thus a principle of organisation of things. Crucial in this doctrine was the belief that just as the soul or mind is the principle of individual life, so this pervasive life force - identified with the elements of air and fire and encapsulated in the term *pneuma*, or 'breath' - constitutes the soul of the universe, and 'the souls of all living things.'[105]

In this endless cycle of repetition, the soul of an individual man is a part, 'a spark,' Grayling calls it, of the world soul. Because the soul of the universe is benevolent, all human beings share equally in the responsibilities of membership in the universal community, especially in the responsibility of attuning one's life and character to the *logos*, 'serenely indifferent to the vagaries of external events' as Martin and Barresi remark. In this philosophy, the Platonic cardinal virtues of intelligence, courage, justice and self-mastery are implied, and involve a species of knowledge. To interpret the Stoic doctrine from another standpoint, the idea of self-possession is linked to that of responsibility for oneself, and this is in turn linked to responsibility to the human community.

Some of these ideas are evident in Epictetus' *Enchiridion*, which begins:

Of all existing things some are in our power, and others are not in our power. In our power are thought, impulse, will to get and will to avoid, and, in a word, everything which is our own doing. Things not in our power include the body, property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything which is not our own doing. Things in our power are by nature free, unhindered, untrammelled; things not in our power are weak, servile, subject to hindrance, dependent on others.[106]

Epictetus was a Roman slave who defended the moral theory of Stoicism, according to which the good life can be achieved by adjusting one's desires to the way of the world rather than trying to adjust the world to satisfy one's desires. As in the teachings that preceded them, the Stoics also placed high value on honour and self-respect. In the Stoics' naturalistic view of human life, it is one's beliefs and one's judgement of what befalls each of us that bring about happiness or unhappiness. One

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[105] A.C. Grayling, 2004, p.52 and Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, p.25
[106] From *Epictetus: The Discourses and Manual*, 'Enchiridion', translated by P.E. Matheson (1917). In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.189

should therefore not be disappointed or feel sadness for not being in control of things that are beyond one's power to control:

It is silly to want your children and your wife and your friends to live for ever, for that means that you want what is not in your control to be in your control, and what is not your own to be yours. […] But if you want not to be disappointed in your will to get, you can attain to that.
Exercise yourself then in what lies in your power. Each man's master is the man who has authority over what he wishes or does not wish, to secure the one or to take away the other. Let him then who wishes to be free not wish for anything or avoid anything that depends on others; or else he is bound to be a slave.[107]

The importance of Stoicism in later conceptions of the self would emerge again at the end of the seventeenth century, as one of John Locke's most important preoccupations, and in the thought of William James. The Stoics anticipated an idea that would be central to Locke's view, namely that humans are both 'lumps of matter' and also 'persons' and that these two ascriptions of identity can be determined differently. A great deal of what the term 'stoic' originally meant has also survived in our modern understanding of this word. The Stoic belief in the unique property, or 'essence' of each individual that remained unchanged throughout life can well have led to what we think of as a modern, relational view of personal identity.[108]

Roman Stoicism: from souls to unique selves

In the heyday of Greek democracy, the harmony of the polis relied on the relationships of the individuals within it. These relationships were mainly defined in terms of rights and obligations, that is, in social and legal roles. As the decline of the Greek city-states was followed by a period of pessimism and these relationships waned, Cynics and Stoics in particular emphasised 'inner resources for adaptation to the general malaise.'[109] This gave rise to a new emphasis on individualism, in which the Latin term *persona* seems to have acquired its modern meaning.

This renewed interest on individuals as persons was different from Aristotle's

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[107] *Ibid,* p.192
[108] See Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self,* pp.26-27
[109] Raymond Martin and John Barresi 2006, pp.31-2

approach to individuals and 'human nature', which was mostly generic and interested in character types. Roman philosophers seem to have, by contrast, given consideration to individual character and its unique characteristics. Cicero, for example, believed that humans share with one another the capacity for rationality and the ability to discover their duty. However, in our 'natures and characters', he claimed, there are 'countless' differences among us, and these are potentially good. When Cicero praises the character of the 'wise man', the *persona sapientis*, he is in effect recognising individual uniqueness, and in advising people to take possession of their authentic natures, Cicero becomes 'the first to express the modern idea that there is such a thing as one's *true self*.'[110]

The respect accorded in antiquity to those who possessed a trained memory turns into an exaltation of memory as part of the virtue of Prudence, according to Frances Yates, the British historian who has written a most complete, scholarly work on this subject.[111] Without going into the intricacies of the art of memory as practised by the ancient Greeks and Romans in her study, we can merely note that in such a period the practice of mnemonics begins to be tied to notions of discipline and hard work.

The connection of this practice with Stoicism is made explicit in one of Cicero's very early works, his *De inventione*, where he defines virtue as 'a habit of mind in harmony with reason and the order of nature', a Stoic definition of virtue, as we clearly recognise. Memory, in turn, figures in this work as a prominent component of Prudence, 'the knowledge of what is good', according to Cicero:

Prudence is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, foresight (*memoria, intelligentia, providentia).* Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.[112]

The explicit link between prudence and memory inaugurated a different role for memory throughout the Middle Ages. As an advocate of a Platonist philosophy,

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[110] *Ibid.*
[111] Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, first published by Routledge & Kegan Paul 1966, Pimlico edition 1992, Pimlico, London, U.K
[112] From Cicero, *De inventione, II,* I.,*iii,* 160*,* translation by H.M. Hubbell in the Loeb edition*,* quoted by F. Yates, 1966/1992, in *The Art of Memory,* pp.35-36

Cicero's definitions of the virtues and their parts in *De inventione* were a very important source for the formulation of what afterwards became known as 'the four cardinal virtues.' And from thinking of memory as part of Prudence to conceiving it as involved in a prudential or *ethical* sense, there was only a short but momentous step, as Yates remarks.[113]

In his *Tusculuan Disputations*, one of the works written after Cicero's retirement with the purpose of spreading the knowledge of Greek philosophy among his countrymen, the divinity of the soul is linked to its power of invention, the power of memory. *Memoria* and *inventio*, thus linked in Cicero's work, are transposed from parts of rhetoric into divisions under which the divinity of the soul is proved, in accordance with the Platonic presuppositions of the orator's philosophy:

A power able to bring about such a number of important results is to my mind wholly divine. For what is the memory of things and words? What further is invention? Assuredly nothing can be apprehended even in God of greater value than this…Therefore the soul, is, as I say, divine, as Euripides dares say, God…[114]

From Plato's point of view, the use of the artificial memory as used by the sophists, as a dazzling but straightforward mnemotechnics device, would be considered anathema, since memory had a higher, more subtle and ennobling function: that of organising the realities of existence. This function was later taken up by the Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance, in the curious form of 'memory theatres.'[115]

Greek Neo-Platonism

In the first five centuries of the Christian era, several types of ethics were developed, more or less under the influence of Platonism. The common denominator in this Neo-Platonist ethics is the view that 'a good life consists in a flight from the world of sense experience to a closer relationship with a supreme principle.' Chief among these

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[113] *Ibid*, p.36
[114] From Cicero's *Tusculuan Disputations*, I.,xxv, 65, quoted in F. Yates, 1966/1992, *The Art of Memory*, pp.58-59
[115] These complicated architectural edifices were designed to symbolise the complexity that particular kinds of memory systems sought to represent, where images based on archetypes of reality were placed on specific locations that orators would recognise and use as points of reference.

Greek writers were Philo Judaeus, Plutarch of Chaeronea, and Plotinus.[116]

Plotinus (205-270 CE) was the greatest philosopher in these centuries – yet he is rarely mentioned in the histories of ethics, as Bourke has found. He studied at Alexandria and began to teach in Rome when he was about forty. Partially blind, Plotinus devoted much of his time to solitary meditation. He knew the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics and used all of them in his personal thinking. His lectures were edited by his pupil Porphyry in six books called the *Enneads*.[117] Plotinus' philosophy centred on a unitary supreme principle, or 'the One', which some interpreters identify with a personal God, though Plotinus uses both personal and impersonal pronouns to refer to it. From the One issues Intelligence (*nous*). This contains the Ideas, like Plato's ideal Forms. In turn, Intelligence gives rise to a second emanation, Soul (*psyche*), a cosmic soul, in itself not associated with the corporeal. The world soul animates the whole physical universe. Each human being is a composite of Soul and bodily matter. 'Man' is therefore poised in a precarious position of existence, capable of going up or down in the scale of reality; down towards the material and thus evil, or up toward his origin in the One, and thus perfection.[118]

Much of the first *Ennead* is dedicated to the proposition that 'the good life for man' consists in a voluntary ascent of the individual soul toward the One. In the review of his predecessors' notions on well-being, Plotinus covers the views of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans. Like Aristotle, he insists on the active character of *eudaimonia* and is quite critical of the Stoic restriction of final happiness to the rational soul alone. In another chapter, Plotinus shows how the beautiful (*to kalon*) provides a starting point from which the soul may rise to the contemplation of its own beauty and eventually of the ideal Beauty. This description of the ascent of the soul toward a peak of perfection is a reworking of the thought of several of Plato's dialogues. Elsewhere, Plotinus suggests that he has himself experienced this mystical phenomenon:

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[116] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, *History of Ethics: Vol. 1,* p.71
[117] *Ibid*, p.74
[118] *Ibid*, pp.74-5

Often I awaken to myself by escaping from my body: thus cut off from other things, in the intimacy of my self, I see a beauty that is as marvellous as can be. Above all, then, I am convinced that I have a higher destiny; my activity is the highest degree of life; I am in union with the divine, and, once I have reached this peak of activity, I fasten to it above the other intelligible beings.[119]

Plotinus is very insistent on the incorruptibility of man's soul, offering several arguments from Plato's *Phaedo*, and on the generic similarity between the life of the soul and the divine life. Moreover, it is in a process of self-perfection through virtues such as temperance, courage, justice and prudence that the soul is cleansed from interest in the body and sense objects. Through virtues one moves up to the Intelligence, and through wisdom (*sophia*) a self ascends to the Highest.

Plotinus' ethics is a remarkable version of self-perfectionism; a teleological theory directed toward the attainment of a contemplative and loving union with a supreme End. Plotinus' ethical vision fascinated many spiritual-minded thinkers in the ensuing centuries. In his mystical visions of the afterlife, Plotinus not only elaborated on Plato's views, but also created a new conception of 'unity with God.' Indirectly through Islamic and Jewish mysticism, Plotinus' thoughts would also remain influential throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Six centuries earlier, Plato had claimed that the rational part of a person's soul enabled them to live morally. Plotinus' ideas foreshadowed discussions that would re-emerge in the eighteenth century and then again in our times.[120]

As Neo-Platonism spread, the belief in the mystical union of the soul with the divine principle gave Platonic Idealism a new dimension, which the incipient Christian movement was quick to assimilate. The ideas of Plotinus in particular and his influence in the further development of Neo-Platonic philosophy were taken up and transformed by an increasingly dominant Christianity, where they would trigger many interpretations and also spark many a debate.

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[119] Plotinus quoted in Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, *History of Ethics: Vol. I,* p.76
[119] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.76
[120] Plotinus' thoughts about the unity of consciousness are also similar to Locke's ideas, except for the element of mysticism in his theories. (See Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.35-38)

This chapter introduced the central notion of *the good*, which arising from antiquity, sets in train the discussion that is fundamental to this thesis. The classical attempt to define 'goodness' as it appears in the Socratic teachings, is constructed by Plato in a contemplative, dualistic conception of *eudaimonia*, where the tension between the higher and lower impulses of body and soul are resolved through the practice of self-mastery and the exercise of wisdom, prudence, courage and temperance. The Platonic idea of a *good life*, with its emphasis on rationality, justice, truth and beauty, is both expanded and contrasted with its Aristotelian counterpart, which focuses on practical activity and rationality, in a teleological approach to 'what is good for man' that centres on the exercise of the intellectual and the moral virtues as a way of attaining human happiness.

Aristotle emphasises *faring well*, living well as a human being, as the *telos* of a good life. The practice of the Aristotelian virtues that shape the behaviour of a good and honourable human being can still have the power to hold up rationally-founded standards according to which we evaluate human actions. While there are undoubtedly questions to be answered in the idealised construction of the virtuous individual that the leisurely Greek elite sought to emulate, many of the proposals to achieve happiness and self-fulfilment can still help us in determining own our own goals for self-realisation, given the universal and timeless appeal of their overall purpose: the creation of a just and moral society where honourable conduct is its own reward.

Platonic idealism and rationality and the Aristotelian concern with practical wisdom in virtuous living are integral to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies that followed, and that emphasised freedom, justice and self-reliance respectively, enhancing in the process the notion of *the good* and influencing Western thought from their inception. Living prudently, honourably and justly, is also in Epicureanism a path to goodness, but this is achieved in personal contentment and tranquillity, and when individuals are free to seek pleasure through reasoned and responsible moral choice. The importance of this doctrine, introducing the idea of the freedom of moral choice, is significant for later definitions of humans as autonomous moral agents. The Socratic notion of self-mastery is equally important to Stoic philosophy, from which we derive the idea of adjusting our desires in order to avoid disappointments in our dealings with the world.

The emphasis on the ability of the self to judge and to achieve happiness also introduces the naturalistic view of human life in which individuals begin to assume personal responsibility for what befalls them, and which sees this sense of community universalised to include 'the souls of all living things.' Stoicism also anticipates the full conception of personhood and identity, adumbrated in Cicero's writings, where the uniqueness of the self in subsequent explorations of our 'human nature' is already perceived in this strand of Roman Stoicism, and where the Platonic idea of the divinity of the soul is woven into this notion, this time supported by memory and imagination. To all these philosophies, these innovative ways of thinking, we owe the ensuing perspectives that positioned the Western self in relation to the changing social, economic and political contexts that enabled us to define ourselves as free and rational ethical beings.

This chapter has begun by weaving the *poietic* thread that links us to those ancient ways of conceptualising and defining who we are, what we are capable of, what humans then as much as now continue to strive for: happiness and self-fulfilment, true knowledge and self-understanding. From the hierarchical and closed societies in which these doctrines first developed to our contemporary existence, these goals remain, integral to our constant desire to define our humanity, to understand the *poiesis* of our 'human nature.'

What was then the precise influence of classical thought on Christian ethics and Christian theology as we allow the ancient philosophers to recede into the background? What about the attempts to further reconcile Christianity with an increasingly obsessive Scholastic preoccupation with logic and science? These questions will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Two
Beyond Classical Antiquity

Introduction

The eastern half of the Roman Empire, centred on the old Byzantium, fell to the Turks in 1453. The fall of Constantinople, as it was called then, signalled the Empire's collapse, and sealed the Mediterranean world from the Middle East. Arab civilisation, which had flourished under Islam from the seventh century, had in the meantime spread across North Africa and from there to the Iberian Peninsula and parts of the Mediterranean. It was in Muslim Spain that Greek philosophy and science were preserved until European scholarship rediscovered them, when about the second half of the eleventh century translations of Greek philosophy from Arabic and Greek became available, in Latin, across Europe. These new translations, focusing on Aristotle, were also followed by the first translations of many of Plato's works, ensuring that, well into the thirteenth century, Augustinian Platonism prevailed in the Latin West.

Since the time that Constantine adopted Christianity and made it an official religion of the empire, the Christian Church had claimed a monopoly on all forms of philosophical thought and had actively discouraged independent or unorthodox views. Christianity prevailed in the Western world from about the beginning of the fourth century CE until well into the eighteenth, and beyond, and any discussion of 'human nature' and morality that is encompassed by this period of human history would need to take account of its undeniable power and its consequences for both scientific and humanistic enquiry.

Our *poietic* account in this chapter traces the manner in which, from about the second to the thirteenth century, Christian writers in the West, strongly influenced by Platonic and Aristotelian ideas, came to adapt and integrate the classical notion of *the good* into their thinking on morality and virtue in their philosophy as well as in their ethics. For all of this period, Neo-Platonism, with its rationalist tradition of speculative thought, had been the accepted philosophy throughout Christian Europe. Some time in

the thirteenth century however, when the translations of Aristotle and his commentators arrived in the West, a renewed interest in Aristotle's empirical approach coincided with the Scholastic attempts to account for 'human nature' and human morality.

As the Scholastic age waxed and waned in Europe, followed by the humanism of the Renaissance, a blend of Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of the good life was infused with new humanistic perspectives. *Human reason* applied to questions of morality, and linked to an inner sense of obligation, allowed a measure of individual freedom and responsibility to emerge, foreshadowing the autonomous, rational self of modernity. At this point, there was less concern with harmonising Christian theology, as a revitalised spirit of enquiry emerged that would form the foundation of the Enlightenment and modern empirical science. Alongside these historical developments, Christianity remained a powerful force, even though contested in the basic tenets of its theology, while an uneasy compromise was attempted in an effort to reconcile belief with reason, the basis of an emerging scientific spirit.

What is interesting about all the moral writing of the period is a noticeable movement towards *inwardness* and *self-reflection*, following Augustine, which gradually develops a more humanistic, even secular, preoccupation with morality, and a moving towards *personal conscience* as a guide to human conduct. In the process, individuality and selfhood begin to take a more prominent role, as the classical aspirations for living a good life continue to figure in Western philosophy, combined with different understandings of Christian theology. In the course of such debates, Christianity itself would undergo transformations, as the principles that sustained theological dogma, the basis of Christian ethics and morality, came under closer scrutiny and revision.

The thinking that began with Copernicus, that Galileo, Bacon and Newton would continue, began to challenge the image of the cosmic universe, as a world was posited where *materiality* reigned over everyday existence. The earth's displacement from the centre of the universe meant that the metaphysical hierarchy was no longer evident; human beings could no longer derive meaning from the allotted place of their soul in the cosmos. Everything concerning human reality could be now understood, it was

thought, with the new laws of physics that would explain ordinary existence in mechanistic terms better than the 'final causes'. This is the dawn of the most significant radical fracture in the *poiesis* of 'human nature', when reason was to be redefined by scientific empiricism, often conflicting with received wisdom and the fixed explanations of morality that had hereto defined our humanity.

2.1   From antiquity to Christianity

In both Plato and Aristotle, rationality is the evaluative criterion to determine what is good for 'man' and to assign a hierarchy to particular goods. That rationality is so highly valued can be explained by the fact that it implied a standard that could only be appealed to because there was a practice defined by those who shared the social life in which this practice was established, as MacIntyre has observed.[121] Social life among the Greeks and Romans was based on the social structure of the *polis*, and in such a structure, it was the ruling male elite that determined its character. The ideal of the perfected life of abstract contemplation was only accessible to this particular leisurely class, a small but powerful minority that excluded the mass of ordinary men - not to mention women, and a huge number of slaves, the spoils of the wars that enabled the city-state to become an empire - both from political power and from the moral ideal.

In classical antiquity, the sharp antithesis between the individual and the state is thus inescapable. But for the Stoics in particular, the law of nature and of reason are the same; the moral law and the physical universe come to share a source, a prefiguring of Christianity, where everyone is valued as part of the universal totality. For the private citizens of the large impersonal kingdoms and empires of the Hellenistic and Roman world, Epicureanism and Stoicism were undoubtedly convenient and consoling doctrines. The Stoic thus becomes a citizen of the cosmos, not of the polis.[122] Stoicism provides a better rationale for participation in public life, Epicureanism for withdrawing from it. But the doctrines of the Roman upper class are useless to those who do not own property, or have the means to enjoy the contemplative life. As MacIntyre observes:

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[121] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, 'Postcript to Greek Ethics', in *A Short History of Ethics*, pp.84-86
[122] *Ibid*, pp.96-102

Exposed to poverty, disease, death, and to the will of those who are their rulers and often enough their owners, they will question how they are to live and what virtue and what happiness might be in their case. For some of these the mystery religions provided an answer. For even more an answer was to be given with the coming of Christianity.[123]

Christianity, which began as a sect of Judaism, resulted in a theology that could accommodate a wide range of views in ethics. And yet, in speaking of a continuous tradition and of a single religion, we presuppose some sort of unity that consists in certain themes which, although they allow for different norms and behaviour, still furnish an entirely distinctive context. These themes are also susceptible of doctrinal development in a number of quite different directions. The Christian model conceives of moral precepts in terms of commandments and of moral goodness in terms of obedience to an infinite, eternal God. By conceiving such a non-finite object as God, God loses particularity, and this object, not identifiable as a particular being, is secure from displacement, even though the concept of God and the reason why one should obey him also becomes questionable. Christianity presents God as a better moral guide than anyone else, and therefore gives us a reason for obeying his commands, by replying that God is not only good, but also omniscient. It is therefore God's power and moral perfection that makes it reasonable for us to do what He commands.[124]

The concept of the authority of God as applied in morals is both useful and dangerous at the same time, however. To follow what God commands simply so that we can avoid punishment may strike us as a self-interested motive for pursuing the good, and can make a religious morality appear self-defeating, insofar as it was originally designed to condemn pure self-interest. But the power of God is a useful, and for certain periods of history, morally indispensable concept. It may help to keep alive an understanding of the connection where any relationship between virtue and happiness appears accidental in a particular form of society. The danger of this concept is that it also raises the possibility that the connection between virtue and happiness is made only in an afterlife, and not on earth, as used to be the case for most of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. This is often a desperate remedy for morality in impoverished and disordered societies to date, but as MacIntyre also remarks, 'this

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[123] *Ibid*, pp.104-5
[124] *Ibid*, pp.108-9

should not obscure the fact that it has provided such a remedy.'[125]

Christianity, like all world religions, has been the bearer of new values. The distinctive values of equality and of the criteria of need have moral content because they implied a type of human community in which nobody has superior rights of a moral or political kind to anyone else. MacIntyre wrote on the 'paradox of Christian ethics' when the first edition of *A Short History of Ethics* appeared, seeing Christianity as trying to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements that were addressed to individuals or small communities 'to separate themselves off from the rest of society.' Nevertheless, in the Preface added later, he recognises that this paradox had already been resolved within the New Testament itself, through the Pauline doctrines and the mission of the church to the world, which shows a commitment to this-worldly activity in and through an understanding of the theological virtues by which human beings rediscover the true nature of their natural ends.[126]

Christianity enjoins a central commitment to a morality of divine command, based on the promise of salvation and redemption, and eternal life, as do the other two main world's religions based on revelation. With its ethics based on duty, where God is to be obeyed for the sake of avoiding punishment and because of the intrinsic goodness of God, the appeal to the fundamental 'non-rationality of faith' as an argument to obey God, or to his supposed love for mankind, do not seem to be sufficient as rational reasons to obey divine command, and for many in our modern world, Grayling observes, 'such assertions are unmeaning.'[127] The question these days may be rather phrased in terms of whether there can be an ethical understanding of human action without reference to a religious view of human beings and the natural world. While some see no conflict between a personal ethics and religious belief, there are many thinkers who urge the need to keep secular and religious matters separate at the very least, if not to dispense with religious beliefs altogether.[128]

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[125] *Ibid*, p.110
[126] Preface, *A Short History of Ethics*, p.ix
[127] A.C. Grayling, 2004, *What is Good?*, p.71
[128] We only have to think of the popularity that Richard Dawkins' 2006 publication, *The God Delusion,* has enjoyed and the ongoing debate on this issue that his forceful response to sweeping religious fundamentalism continues to stir. Similar views have been expressed in Michel Onfray's 2007 *The Atheist Manifesto: The Case against Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, and in Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great*: *How Religion Poisons*

There is within Christianity nevertheless, an old tradition that has sought to infuse rationality into Christian dogma and present it as the best formula to live the good life. Within the stern dogma of this and many other religions, the concept of love is paramount and provides its own rationality. Whether this is understood as the love of a putative God for humanity, or the love of human beings for the expression of divinity, spirituality, or, as is often the case, in communion with all human and sentient beings, it is often felt as what many would call *transcendence*, which takes a form of living one's life that is not so distant from the virtues valued by classical antiquity.[129]

But to return to the events that followed soon after the birth of the Christian movement, we find that the destruction by the Romans of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE left the Jerusalem Christian community in disarray. Previously, this fledging movement had been directed and controlled from within, by the Jerusalem community itself, the unique source of authority in faith and discipline. Afterward, Christian life was organised and directed by churches in Rome, Antioch, Ephesus and Alexandria. The consequences in this shift of power, not only for Christians at the time but for the events that followed, were momentous.[130]

As Christian dogma became interpreted and transformed in the centuries that followed, the uniqueness of the self comes to inaugurate a series of debates. Concepts such as individual freedom and autonomy, of such importance in later discussions on morality and 'human nature', were already by then foreshadowed as pagan, and Christian beliefs became endlessly entangled and redefined, leading to the final revival of classical antiquity from the Renaissance onwards. 'Human nature' and morality became increasingly intertwined, and complex to define as a result.[131]

Everything, of the same year. Also in 2007, Philip Kitcher wrote more sensitively about the comfort and inspiration that religion can bring to many people in his *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*. Julian Young's 2003 publication, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, offered an overview of how important Western philosophers have found life meaningful outside of Christianity's 'grand narrative.'

[129] Raimond Gaita would have to count among the moral philosophers who would most likely be in agreement, given some qualifications, with this assertion. And Charles Taylor, of course, who stands out as one of the most distinguished and thoughtful moral philosophers of our time, also happens to be a devoted Christian. Terry Eagleton has recently raised persuasive arguments that aim for a middle ground, in his 2009 *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*.

[130] Raymond Martin, and John Barresi, 2006, 'Christianity', in *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity*, Columbia University Press, New York, p.48

[131] In their concluding remarks on 'Monotheism and Western Conceptions of Self', Martin and Barresi observe that collectively, the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, 'bequeathed to the philosophy

2.2   Theology and ethics in the Patristic and early Middle Ages

Late in the second century of the Christian era, most of the scriptural documents that would form the New Testament were well known to Christian thinkers, and it was mainly the task of those classically educated pagans who had converted to Christianity, the *apologists*, and which subsequent Church Fathers would continue, to determine what Christian dogma should be and what it should mean. It was during this period that the first Christian writings that could also be called ethical in any philosophical sense were produced. It was also in the Patristic Period - the time when the Fathers, or *Patres* of the Church lived and taught - that a continuous tradition of discussion of self and personal identity issues began, motivated primarily by the need to make sense of some aspects of Christian dogma. In fact, throughout the Patristic Period and well into the Middle Ages, pagan philosophy was to play an important role in the formulation of what until our time has remained basic Christian doctrine.[132]

The principal dogmas that stood in need of rationalisation at the time were the Trinity, the divinity of Christ and the Resurrection, still central to Christian theology today. On these issues, Scripture is ambiguous, and it was only in Greek philosophy once more and its Roman and Jewish derivatives that the early Patristic theologians were able to find some answers. The doctrine of the resurrection posed a number of problems, central as was then and still is to Christian belief. Platonic dualism was no longer useful for explaining the continuation of the individual and his or her bodily identity, and the dogma of resurrection had its foundation on a new emphasis on individuality, as it was essential for individuals to believe in the survival of bodily death, and that as individuals, they were to be held accountable for their own behaviour on earth.

Notwithstanding the problems that this doctrine presented, the view that a moral teaching based on a well-promulgated set of precepts backed by divine authority does

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of self and personal identity its most enduring preoccupations: personhood, subjectivity, and identity over time.' (Martin R., and Barresi J., 2006, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, p.54)

[132] I draw on Raymond Martin and John Barresi's account of the unfolding of these questions in early Christianity to inform my discussion here. (Martin, R., and Barresi, J., 2006, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, 'Introduction', p.2, and pp.55-74), and also on Vernon J. Bourke's detailed account of the Patristic and early medieval period in relation to ethics. (Bourke, Vernon, J., 1968/2008 'Patristic and Early Medieval Ethics', *History of Ethics, Graeco-Roman to Early Modern Ethics, Vol.1*, pp.83-116)

involve an ethical position was advanced by the so-called 'theological approbative theories', found in the writings of Christians before the thirteenth century.[133] None of these early teachers had read the works of Aristotle, who only became influential in the West from the thirteenth century onwards, while their contemporaries in the Islamic and Jewish schools had studied the *Nicomachean Ethics* and other similar works long before the Christians did. These early Christian moral writers did not make a complete break with ancient Jewish traditions, and nor did New Testament morality negate the precepts of the old Jewish law, but it did give a greater emphasis to love as the inner motivation of the believer who wished to live a righteous life. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there was a certain tension in early Christian writings between a strictly juridical approach to moral problems and a tendency to emphasise mercy, love, and good will.[134]

Although the Church Fathers and medieval writers on ethics all accepted a code of moral precepts as imposed by divine command, the first speculation about ethical obligations and their relation to laws in this period may have taken place among Christians who belonged to the 'Oriental' Church, in the Near East and in North Africa. The full ethical significance of this early Christian thought in the Near East, however, has not been properly studied to date, according to Bourke.[135] In the same period, a very active and productive school of Greek Christian thought was developing in Alexandria, a very cosmopolitan city from the third century of the Christian era. Some of its earliest representatives adapted the rationalism of Platonic ethics, combining in their writings a Christian version of the Plotinian 'flight of the soul' to the highest good and making divine precepts the guide for living a good life. Some of these writings are also the earliest accounts of Christian mysticism.[136]

In the period before the thirteenth century, the Western, or Latin, section of the Christian Church produced a good many writers who touched on fundamental

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[133] This terminology, according to Bourke, is used in T.E. Hill's *Contemporary Ethical Theories*, MacMillan, New York, 1950, pp.97-113, to describe similar types of twentieth century ethics. (Bourke, Vernon J., 1968/2008, *History of Ethics*, p.95, and Note 4., p.337)

[134] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, 'Patristic and Early Medieval Ethics', *History of Ethics*, pp.85-86

[135] Bourke gives as an example of Near East Christian thought the work of Syrian Bardaisan of Edessa (154-222), who argued that given that laws differ and are easily changed in the various countries in which they are made, a person is internally free to choose right or wrong actions. (Bourke, Vernon J., 1968/2008, pp.86-7)

[136] The message of these treatises is nevertheless obscure and their orthodoxy as Christian teachings is open to suspicion, according to Bourke. (Bourke, Vernon J., 1968/2008, pp.90-1)

questions of ethics. Among the key figures in this tradition, the Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Augustine, are the most prominent. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, applied Cicero's *De Officiis* to the Christian setting, thus influencing Christian moral theology. He also appears to have had more than a passing interest in Neo-Platonic philosophy; adopting the Plotinian view that evil is nothing positive but a privation of good, and showing the same influence in his treatment of the virtues and vices. Ambrose also pictured the good life as a flight of the soul from the world to God, thus transmitting Greek philosophical ideas to the early Latin Church.[137]

Augustinian search for the 'summum bonum'

The Latin Father of the Church who has the most completely developed moral theory is Augustine of Hippo. Greatly influential throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation and beyond, he became an authority among Latin Christian thinkers second only to the Bible. Augustine only knew of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* through reports in Latin writers such as Cicero, and had limited acquaintance with the dialogues of Plato, but Platonism, including the thought of Plotinus, appeared to him to be the best of the pagan philosophies, as one of the chapters in his *City of God* shows. Like Socrates, he stressed the importance of caring for one's soul, and saw reason as an endowment that God had given human beings so that they could lead a good life.

His ethical position is as eudaimonistic as any in classical Greek thought, since he believed that all men desire and strive for happiness. Augustine grappled in his mind with questions of evil, human freedom, the nature of time, the soul and human psychology, but he did not subscribe to the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism, popular in his day. He thought that man's final felicity cannot consist in mere perfection of the human person, such as that reached through virtue or knowledge, but rather in a special sort of union, after the death of the body, with God.[138] Holding the view that in any human being, soul and body form an intimate unit, Augustine wrote:

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[137] *Ibid*, p.97
[138] *Ibid*, p.98

A man is not a body alone, not a soul alone, but a being composed of both…The soul is not the whole man, but the better part of man, the body not the whole, but the inferior part of man…When both are joined, they receive the name of *man*…[However,] even while a man is alive, and body and soul are united, [Scripture] calls each of them singly by the name, *man*, speaking of the soul as the *inward man*, and of the body as the *outward man*, as if there were two men, though both together are indeed but one.[139]

While he rejected the Platonic view that the soul is immutable and that the body is a prison from which the soul yearns to be free, Augustine acknowledged that the body is subordinate to the soul. He claimed that the body should be regarded as a 'temple' rather, and that after death, when the soul is separated from the body, the soul yearns to be reunited with it. As he attempted to explain this version of Christian dualism, the relation of the soul to the body, Augustine discovered the nature of his own existence, and that of God, the ultimate source of good:

By the Trinity, thus supremely and equally and unchangeably good, all things were created; […] Taken as a whole, however, they are very good, because their *ensemble* constitutes the universe in all its wonderful order and beauty.[140]

In this view, the world is beautiful and orderly; it is a proof of a divine creator, the origin of a final cause and purpose. Augustine's doctrine has parallels with the Platonic idea of *the good* insofar as in Plato the image of the sun as the origin of light and understanding is central, while in Augustine's doctrine God is the only source of light - the ultimate principle of both being and knowledge. God is not just 'out there'; it is also an 'inner light.' The famous Augustinian dictum: '*Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas'*: 'Do not go outward; return within yourself; in the inward man dwells truth', signals that the principal route to God, and therefore to truth and knowledge, is not through the object domain but *in* ourselves, as Charles Taylor has suggested.[141]

Divine illumination is available to all men, to show them the initial truths of knowing, existing, and acting. God's 'light' is not merely a cognitive principle, but also a

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[139] From Augustine, *City of God,* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 2, cited in Raymond Martin, and John Barresi, 2006, p.71
[140] From the book *St. Augustine's Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love,* edited by Henry Paloucci, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter, Markie, 2002, *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, p.201
[141] Charles Taylor, 1989, *Sources of the Self,* pp.128-29

source of moral information and guidance. In looking to God, the soul of 'man' finds the source of all reality and goodness. Our first notions of equality, order, right thinking (*prudentia*), moderation (*temperantia*), strength of character (*fortitude*), justice (*rectitudo*, *justitia*), and other such ethical ideas, come to us through a personal intuition which is made possible by the divine light. The following passage shows how Augustine presented this intuition of the eternal standards (*rationes aeternae*) of ethical judgement:

So also among the objects of the understanding, there are some that are seen in the soul itself: for example, the virtues (to which the vices are opposed), either virtues which will endure, such as piety, or virtues that are useful for this life and not destined to remain in the next, as faith, by which we believe what we do not see, and hope, by which we await with patience the life that shall be, and patience itself, by which we bear every adversity until we arrive at the goal of our desires. These virtues, of course, and other similar ones, which are quite necessary for us now in living in our exile, will have no place in the blessed life [in Heaven], for the attainment of which they are necessary. And yet even they are seen with the understanding…distinct from these objects is the light by which the soul is illuminated, in order that it may see and truly understand everything., either in itself or in the light. For the light is God himself…[142]

Augustine believed in personal freedom, the importance of good will, and the need of proper internal motivation, one that arises by our desire to love God, the principle of good living. For him, one who truly loves God will act in full accord with all the precepts of divine and moral law, and the love of God is thus what motivates all good moral actions. In spite of the intensely religious colouring of his teaching, we find in the third and last part of the eighth book of the *City of God*, an explanation of how Augustine understands ethics:

It deals with the supreme good, by reference to which all our actions are directed. It is the good we seek for itself and not because of something else and, once it is attained, we seek nothing further to make us happy. This, in fact, is why we call it our end, because other things are desired on account of this *summum bonum*, while it is desired purely for itself.[143]

In Augustinian doctrine, to look towards God's activity is also to look at the self, to

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[142] From *De Genesi ad litteram,* XII, 31, 50; trans. J.H. Taylor, in *The Essential Augustine*, p.97, quoted by Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, in 'Patristic and Early Medieval Ethics', *History of Ethics*, p.100
[143] Quoted in Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, 'Patristic and Early Medieval Ethics', p.103

take up *a reflexive stance*, as Taylor has defined it. This stance becomes radical with the adoption of the first-person standpoint. We can then turn and make the dimension of experience the object of our attention, when we 'become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us.' This is what Taylor means by adopting a stance of *radical reflexivity*, a notion that enables a conscious use of language in the constitution of the self.[144] The Augustinian tradition of thought, the radical reflexivity that allows us to take a first-person standpoint, has been fundamental to conceptions of the self, from Descartes onwards. It provides an important 'certainty of self-presence', which is also fundamental to our search for the truth.[145]

Augustinian doctrine was passed down as a set of teachings that included acceptance of the eternal presence of Ideas in the mind of God, their immediate comprehension by human reason, and the incorporeality and immortality of the human soul. Augustine's claim that Plato's doctrines were closer than other pagan philosophy to Christian doctrine, encouraged later attempts to reconcile them once more.[146]

The conception of 'the good' in other Latin theologians

Other influential Latin writers illustrate in their own work the pervasive influence of classical ideas on their particular conception of *the good*, which they in turn adapted in their own Christian ethics, and in their particular application of their theories to practical living.

The Roman senator Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius would seem to be the first Latin scholar in the Christian Church who was well acquainted with the *Nichomachean Ethics*, although he preferred some of the teachings of Plato and was also favourably impressed by the practical philosophy of the Stoics. His best known work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, is evidence of Boethius' attempt to build a practical philosophy of life that included elements of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and

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[144] 'Radical reflexivity brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one's being the agent of experience, something to which access by its very nature is asymmetrical: there is a crucial difference between the way I experience my activity, thought and feeling, and the way that you or anyone else does. This is what makes me a *being that can speak of itself in the first person.*' (Charles Taylor, 1989, p.131; emphasis added)
[145] *Ibid*, pp.131-35
[146] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.75-6

Stoicism with the context of a Christian morality, arguing that all the goods that humans strive for are imperfect and not lasting, and reasoning that there must be some Perfect Good which is the objective terminus of these human aspirations for happiness. The existence of God represents for Boethius the perfect and fullest good. This way of arguing to the conclusion that God is the objective goal of all moral striving became an important element in the teleological ethics of later Scholasticism.[147]

There are numerous writings on detailed questions of practical morality in the centuries immediately following Boethius, many unedited and unstudied. In the ninth century, however, we find John Scottus Erigena writing his *De divisione naturae*, a vast metaphysical work of Neo-Platonic ethics that combines Plotinian emanationism with Christian creationism. In this work, Erigena purports to explain how all things, including human beings, come forth from the one cause and eventually return to this divine Principle. He explains that the man who lives a morally good life not only reunites with God, but that his ultimate condition is a becoming like God (*deifactio*). This deification is granted only to the good.[148]

After Erigena, there is no Latin writer on morality of comparable stature until the eleventh century, when Anselm, an Italian who trained in a Benedictine monastery in France and became a renowned bishop of the English see of Canterbury, emphasised the personal attitude of the moral agent as the determinant of moral good or evil. St. Anselm was very much indebted to Augustine in his moral psychology, and he claimed that the will is the most important aspect of the soul. In some respects however, Anselm followed Plato, arguing that man's will is subject to two dispositions (*affectiones*) prior to any moral activity. The first one inclines man to desire the various goods that are appropriate to his ordinary state of existence; the second enables men to incline volitionally toward a better than natural good, the justification of the will given by divine grace. Defining true freedom as 'the power of preserving rectitude of will, for the sake of the rectitude itself', Anselm anticipates something of Kant's theory of the pure and good will.[149]

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[147] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, 'Patristic and Early Medieval Ethics', pp.104-6
[148] *Ibid*, pp.107-8
[149] *Ibid,* pp.108-10

The tensions between the subjective demands of personal conscience and the objective requirements of a moral law that transcends 'human nature' are perhaps best exemplified by Peter Abelard, who with his *Ethica seu liber dictus scito tepsum*, his landmark treatise on this subject, was one of the few writers in the early Middle Ages to first use the term 'ethics'. Abelard speaks of intention (*intentio*) as the focal point of moral good and evil, though his terminology and thought fluctuated on questions of whether sin necessarily involves an act of willing or not. He believed that for a man's intention to be right, it had to be in objective conformity with God's laws, and good intention is one that actually pleases God, even though he did not indicate how ordinary people can know this objectively.[150] Later on in his life, reflecting on the sad circumstances that led him away from his beloved Heloise to his life in a monastery, Abelard wrote in his *Ethics* that 'virtue consists not in behaviour but in living in love with God, while vice consists in living outside of love with God.' Personal conscience, for Abelard, is therefore binding, even when it is mistaken, a claim that seems to have attracted quite a good deal of criticism from his contemporaries.[151]

The view that morality is a matter of some quality of rightness within the soul of each person, what we could now call its intrinsic quality, was already generalised in the twelfth century. This century also saw a revival and popularisation of the ideals of friendship and love that were inspired originally by Cicero's *On Friendship*, and then given a Christian twist by Augustine, in the *Confessions*.[152] It was also during the twelfth century that ethics or moral philosophy came to take an accepted place as a discipline in many Christian schools. What this period shows is a desire to take what is best from the classic Greek and Roman moral writers, such as Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and to adapt their exemplary readings to the requirements of Christian life. Instead of emphasising moral obligation by law, the education of the time

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[150] *Ibid*, pp. 110-12

[151] Abelard's writing, as well as that of Heloise, and their reflections on innermost thoughts and feelings nevertheless illustrate a new movement in understanding and assessing conduct away from the consideration of external behaviour and toward that of inner motivation. A telling symptom of this newfound fascination with exploring the inner space of human subjectivity was the advent between 1000 and 1200, of private confession as part of the Church's normal discipline, as Raymond Martin and John Barresi observe. (Martin R and Barresi, J., 2006, p.90)

[152] Religious considerations aside, it is clear that a new ideal of romantic love had emerged: the idea of service to the beloved as an integral component of love - especially between husband and wife - and of a meaningful life, rather than conceiving of love as a practical arrangement, as it had until that time had been thought of. Twelfth-century troubadours in Europe expressed in their love poems the idea that 'the lover's happiness is dependent on that of the beloved and that service to the beloved is an important component of a meaningful life', according to Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, p.91

recommended the cultivation of the theological virtues, such as faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice, which opposed the vices. Much of the ethical speculation in these Christian writings before the thirteenth century derives from the seminal notions found in the Bible and in the Platonic and Stoic schools of Greek ethics.

During this period the view that God's will, seen as the eternal law, and thus the ultimate and absolute norm of all ethical judgements, prevailed. Already stressed in the patristic and medieval moralists as much as in the theistic medieval Jewish and Muslim traditions,[153] the conviction of a divine source of absolute ethical obligation remained almost unchallenged until well after the time of Kant, in the eighteenth century. But parallel to this, the ethical concept of inner motivation, of personal attitude toward external events in which one is involved, becomes a focal point of moral discussions from that time. This new emphasis brought into medieval ethics by Augustine as much as by Anselm and Abelard, is quite modern in its claims of moral significance and explains the importance that the medieval Christian attached to the human person as a creature of God. Such personal approach to morality, with its focus on personal responsibility, typifies Christian ethics up to the thirteenth century and remains central to such discussions in moral philosophy to date.[154]

2.3   Scholasticism, the Aristotelian synthesis and Thomistic ethics

Humanism came to the fore in a burst of intellectual activity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which led to the founding of universities at such important centres as Paris and Padua, and to the rise of the philosophical movement known as Scholasticism. In the thirteenth century, both Aristotle and his most prominent commentators, including the Arab philosophers Avicenna and Averröes, were adopted

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[153] These traditions are well represented in the first fifteen centuries after Christ of course, and the only reason to omit detailed discussion of them in this thesis is the natural limitation of this kind of study, which, focuses primarily on Western thought. There is no denying however, that there are such important figures as, for example, Ibn Sina, or Avicenna (980-1037), poet, medical doctor, theologian, and lawyer, the greatest of the Eastern school of Muslim philosophers; Ibn Rushd, known as Averroës (1126-1198), the greatest Aristotelian scholar in the history of Islam; the Persian moralist and poet Omar Khayyam (d.ca.1123); and Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1135-1204), the greatest Jewish ethicist in the Middle Ages. Bourke's chapter of this *History*, 'Medieval Jewish and Moslem Ethics', provides a full account of the thought of these and other philosophers and moral thinkers of the period. (Bourke, V, 1968/2008, pp.117-59)
[154] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.112-116

as core components of university curricula. This was an important development, resulting in a more scientific approach to natural philosophy, following Aristotle's empirical emphasis. As the theories of Aristotle began to become known among European thinkers, filtered through the writings and extensive commentaries of many more of the Middle Eastern philosophers and theologians who had studied them, Aristotelian thought promised to provide answers to some of the neo-Platonic quandaries that dominated intellectual speculation.

The new translated writings now available in Latin contained much hitherto unknown natural science, and Aristotle's wide-ranging and systematic approach to scientific knowledge meshed with the new spirit of secular naturalism that independently had begun to make its appearance. To those Christian intellectuals who were hungry for a more scientific approach, Aristotle became known as *the philosopher*, and as such he would be known until the seventeenth century.[155] The problem was now how to reconcile the received view of Christian Neo-Platonism that there is an incorporeal soul inhabiting the body of each human being, with Aristotle's ideas. Over a period of several centuries, mainly under the guidance of Averröes' commentaries,[156] European philosophers gravitated toward the view that certain conflicts between Plato and Aristotle could not be reconciled, and that perhaps Aristotle might not be compatible with Christian dogma after all – but this was still far into the future.

In these thirteenth century debates, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* is the greatest attempt to describe the relationship between God and human beings and 'to fit the full complexity of human nature into a coherent theology', according to Scruton. In this work, Aquinas attempted to bring to completion the picture of 'human nature' and human virtue presented by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and to show its compatibility with the doctrines of revealed religion.[157]

Aquinas holds that man naturally desires to know the first cause of all things, and

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[155] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.93-94
[156] As Aristotelianism began to replace Christian Neo-Platonism, Averröes began to seem more relevant. He became known in the West as *the commentator*, and shared with Avicenna the view that Greek thought formed a harmonious unity, but his focus was more purely Aristotelian. His views, according to Raymond Martin and John Barresi, were given serious consideration and remained influential in Latin universities well into the seventeenth century. (R. Martin and J. Barresi 2006, p.94)
[157] Roger Scruton, 2005, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, second edition, Routledge, London and New York, p.22

since that is God, the ultimate end of 'man' is to know God 'by an act of understanding':

The ultimate end of each thing is God, as we have shown. So, each thing intends, as its ultimate end, to be united with God as closely as is possible for it. Now, a thing is more closely united with God by the fact that it attains to His very substance in some manner, and this is accomplished when one knows something of the divine substance, […] Therefore, an intellectual substance tends to divine knowledge as an ultimate end. […] Therefore, to know God by an act of understanding is the ultimate end of every intellectual substance.[158]

Aquinas' philosophy relied upon the Aristotelian doctrine of substance and also on the achievements of medieval logic, offering support to the power and autonomy of human reason. He was able to do this by reviving interest in the Aristotelian theory of practical reason, held to provide an account of human freedom, together with a description of the 'good life for man' that would recommend itself on the basis of reason alone.[159]

Aquinas' single-substance theory is a modified Aristotelian view of the soul, with the important exception derived from Neo-Platonism that form can combine with existence to make a substance, which allows Aquinas to hold to something like Aristotle's view while preserving the doctrine of personal immortality. Aquinas held that a human being is a whole person or self only when a human body is informed by a rational soul, and he took the view that the soul, separated from the body after death, is a continuation not of the self but only of a part of the self. The separated soul only has abstract knowledge of its own previous activities, but during this phase of its existence, the soul acquires better knowledge of universals and of other intelligences or 'intelligibles' and can acquire a deeper understanding of God. Only when it is reunited with a body at resurrection does the soul reacquire concrete knowledge, as the resurrected person retains powers that the soul acquired during this period of separation from the body. The soul's uniting with the body to form a complete human being is what, according to Aquinas, provides humans with free will as they live their lives - an important notion for the development of personal ethics in the moral

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[158] From Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Chapter 25, 'That to understand God is the end of every Intellectual Substance', *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles*, translated by Vernon J. Bourke. In Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.211-14
[159] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.22

theories that followed.[160]

Natural law and right reason in Thomistic ethics

Thomistic ethics is often classified as a 'natural law' theory, but Vernon Bourke suggests that this moral philosophy belongs to the 'right reason' theories. Like other theorists who can be said to accord with this description, Aquinas believed that God has perfect judgement of individual human actions, but that some part of God's moral wisdom is conveyed to men by way of revelation, while other knowledge of eternal justice is acquired by ordinary natural experience and rational reflection - as Aristotle and Cicero had done before. He was convinced that 'God is not offended by us except by what we do against our own good.' Actions, in other words, are not morally right or wrong because of some arbitrary fiat of divine will; what is 'good for man' is what may be understood as fitting (*conveniens*) to this kind of agent, under certain concrete circumstances, in relation to the purpose that the agent intends to accomplish, and in the real environment of the actions. As expressed in universal judgements about the kinds of actions that are morally appropriate or inappropriate for a human agent, the conclusions of right reasoning are identical with the rules of natural moral law. The result is then a practical judgement of choice and right action that is dictated by moral conscience.[161]

With the advent of Christianity the transcendent notions of Platonism came to have a more specific meaning with God as the giver of the moral law, very much as it had been in the Hebrew tradition. Even though Augustine and Aquinas stressed the love of God as an appropriate feeling and motivation for acting well, the point of doing so now became that of obeying the law. Aquinas followed the Stoics in saying that this law could be discovered in the nature of things by reason, but it acquired a new kind of normativity that came from God. Once again, the structure of moral thinking was that of using reason or faith to discover what it was our duty to do by looking towards a transcendent reality, while controlling the desires and emotions. Augustine had taught that love of things of this world could only distract us from the *love* of God, whereas Aquinas believed that God's *grace* gave us the necessary virtues so that we

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[160] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.100-101
[161] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.185-86

could direct our thinking to higher things and away from this world.[162]

The common understanding towards the end of this period was that it is our duty to do God's will; to live in accordance with nature, conceived as a providential cosmic order, and that the virtues are the states of character that help us achieve this. In this apparently straightforward scheme, *the will of God* comes to be a subject of intense speculation and debate throughout the Scholastic period. Whether 'man' has any part in shaping his own will or not is a parallel concern that foreshadows later discussions on the precise nature of human volition and the power and limitations of human reason.

Faith and rationality: God's will and the human will

In order to maintain Christian Platonic commitments, theological Scholastic philosophers had over the years tended to become more and more accepting of Aristotle's metaphysics. Various attempts to arrive at a satisfactory agreement on the precise nature of the soul had led to different proposals, among which Averröes' view came to the fore. In an initial misconception of Averröes' commentaries, about the time that Aristotle's *De anima* had become the subject of regular lectures at Oxford and Paris, Averröes was thought to have held that each individual human soul had its own agent, or active, intellect, whereas his real view was that there is only one agent intellect, which all humans share. It took another two decades for scholastics to appreciate the implications of Averröes' interpretation of Aristotle, by which time, Neo-Platonism was on the wane.[163]

In patristic and medieval thought there is no discussion of free will (*libera voluntas*); only of free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), but increasingly by the second half of the thirteenth century, more and more people insist that the human will is an essentially free power. This emphasis on volition appears first in Franciscan psychology, which emphasised the affective and volitional side of man's nature.[164] The belief that the

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[162] Stan van Hooft, 2006, p.84
[163] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.94-96
[164] Peter John Olivi, for instance, taught that 'either the will is free, or it is not a will.' Quoted by Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, p.188, in Note 37, p.351, from E. Bettoni's, 'La liberta come fondamento del valori umani nel pensiero di Pier di Giovanni Olivi, *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionales de Filosofia*, (Venezia, 1958), XI., 45

will of 'man' is the most distinctive human power is also found, among others, in the teachings of the Catalan writer Ramón Lull, a layman and the founder of a university which continues to this day as a centre of Catalan culture and Lullism. Following Augustine, Lull believed that the human soul has three main functions: memory, understanding, and willing, and that volition reaches its peak in love. Lull's famous 'Great Art', was simply the teaching that 'man' intuits, by means of divine illumination, a number of self-evident notions: goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, will, virtue, truth, and glory.[165]

The conflict that began in the early part of the century between naturalistic and religious approaches to the idea of the soul, as philosophers began to engage in more experiential and scientific theorising, was eventually resolved in the 1260s with the 'double-truth' theory of the relation between reason and faith, according to which philosophy and religion should pursue truth independently of each other. This theory affected all of late Scholastic, as well as Renaissance thought, and it foreshadowed the more radical divorce between science and religion that would begin in the seventeenth century.[166]

At the end of the century, another unusual thinker, the Dominican Meister Johannes Eckhart, developed a philosophy that was a complicated blending of Neo-Platonic speculation with Christian mysticism. He thought that the 'spark' of the soul (*scintilla animae*) is the highest part of man, above reason and will, and it is in this 'citadel' that God contacts 'man' in mystical union. This is reminiscent of the 'flight of the soul' theories that Plotinus inspired, but in his *Sermons* Eckhart also developed a 'good will' doctrine of human conduct that anticipates Kantian teachings, as shown by this passage:

If you have good will, you shall lack for nothing, neither love, humility, nor any other virtue; what you will with all your strength you shall have, and neither God nor any creature can deprive you – if, again, your will is sound, divine and wrapt in God…Good will is not less powerful for good than bad will is for evil.[167]

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[165] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.190
[166] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, p.102
[167] From Johannes Eckhart, *Talks of Instruction*, trans. R.B. Blakney; reprinted in Jones, *Approaches to Ethics*, pp.162-63, quoted in Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, p.192; Note 43., p.352

In the late Scholastic period, John Duns Scotus, a Scottish Franciscan sympathetic to Neo-Platonism, claimed that not all substances are composed of matter and form. In agreement with the growing tide of Latin Averroeist and double-truth theorists, but contrary to Aquinas, Scotus denied that matter is a principle of individualism, though he thought it likely that humans had an immaterial soul, and that they are a composite of soul and body, as other theologians had proposed before him.[168] Scotus believed that every moral action is an act of willing, but rejected the notion that will, either in God or 'man', is the source of moral law, thinking of conscience as the habit of the practical intellect which elicits human judgement regarding actions, in accordance with the principles of right reason.[169]

William of Ockham, an Oxford-educated Franciscan and a student of Scotus at the University of Paris and then a colleague, did not agree with Scotus' intrinsic character of the good or evil moral action. Ockham's theory said that moral good and evil have nothing to do with the internal character of man or his action but rest on the external attribution of a moral quality. He believed that ethics cannot show that there is an ultimate end for men, thus rejecting the medieval theory of the finality of man's nature. For Ockham, God is the ultimate goal of human aspiration, but he firmly maintained that he did not *know* this philosophically. This is the start of the 'modern way', the '*via moderna*', in ethics, as Bourke points out.[170]

Ockham maintained that neither the existence of God nor the immortality of the human soul can be demonstrated, for if either is accepted, it must be accepted on faith. Combining a version of the nominalist theory with empiricism, Ockham viewed reason as subordinate to and dependent upon the senses. Aquinas himself had also lent support to the scholastic tag '*nihil in intellectus quod nisi prius in sensu*': 'there is nothing in the understanding that is not first in the senses', but Ockham developed the scepticism implied in this saying, which together with a theory of the nature and function of meaning and usage in language, became a focus of the philosophical and logical arguments with which many of the established claims for the power of reason were contested. The ancient dispute about the nature of universals was thus the initial

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[168] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.103-4
[169] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.193-95
[170] *Ibid*, p.196

spark for the growing disagreement between what became known as empiricism and rationalism.[171]

While he thought the power of human reason was limited to prove philosophical conclusions, Ockham nevertheless identified *the will of God* as the ultimate source of morality. Thus begins in Christian thinking about morality the authoritarian teaching that God could rightly order 'man' to do almost anything, and in view of the absolute omnipotence of God, the consequent actions would be good. Moral law is here reduced to positive divine law, and obligation is therefore contingent.[172]

'Natural law is that which has the same force among all men', Aristotle had already claimed in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.[173] Natural law ethics thus contrasted with the positivist character of Ockham's ethics, and based as it was in a strong theological Scholasticism, it had become one of the main schools of moral science and ethical theory, along with Thomism, at the end of the Middle Ages. The expression that is most commonly used by Aquinas and his followers is *jus naturale*, which is usually translated in English as 'natural law.' In the context that concerns us here, '*jus*' means what is objectively right; therefore one apprehends the good quality of one's actions by observing what is in accord with one's nature and what flows from this nature as a reasoning being.[174]

The rise of an ethics founded on reason, following Aquinas' moral philosophy, incorporated the notions that it is the *natural function of man's will* to do what *right reason* dictates. The writings of both Reginald Pecock, a Catholic bishop who wrote a series of English treatises stressed the primacy of reason, and those of the Anglican Richard Hooker, followed similar Thomistic ethics. Pecock argued that the natural function of reason is to decide what ought to be done, for God accepts no good deed unless it be in accord with the judgement of reason.[175] Such writings already reveal

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[171] Some important specific notions emerged from this period, such as that of abstract ideas, adopted by Peter Abelard and bequeathed to Locke and British empiricism, and the doctrine that entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity. This last doctrine, known as 'Ockham's razor' - even though it is not found in his writings - provided the inspiration to much later scientific thought, as Scruton observes. (R. Scruton, 2005, pp.18-19)
[172] Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, pp.198-99
[173] From a quote by Sir John Fortescue in his work on the natural law tradition, *On the Merits of the Laws of England,* in Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.200
[174] Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, pp.180-81
[175] He also distinguished two branches of practical knowledge, moral philosophy and theology, apparently

the importance that reason would be given, anticipating much of the Enlightenment thought, and Kant's in particular. With this renewed status, the understanding that the 'light of Reason' illuminates becomes, according to Hooker, 'that which bindeth creatures reasonable in this world, and with which by reason they may most plainly perceive themselves bound.'[176]

Christian doctrine continued to exert a powerful influence on the minds - and souls - of many of the western philosophers who engaged with such questions, as well as on most of the pioneers who were responsible for the foundations of modern science. Around the seventeenth century, brilliant mathematicians, such as Descartes, were still preoccupied with reconciling the rationality of their findings with their allegiance to the Church, an institution that became more conservative as it saw its traditional beliefs challenged by the likes of Galileo and Descartes himself, whose books were on its proscribed list for some time.

2.4   Classical humanism, Christian ethics and morality redefined

The scientific enquiry that gave rise to the humanism of the early Renaissance spurred revolutions in education, which until then tended to take intellectual authority from ecclesiastics and divorce scientific thinking from religious belief. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, theological dogma was not so readily accepted, and a spirit of scientific enquiry that grew increasingly hostile to religion developed. Fourteenth century Italian humanists saw classical civilisation as a golden age of creative genius. This century and the century that followed was a period of growing secularism and prosperity, due mainly to the expansion of trade; a time when educated Christians were more concerned with culture and literature than with philosophy proper, looking at the great men of antiquity for their models. Latin literature had been studied in the High Middle Ages, and Renaissance humanists added the study of classical Greek literature, which in the early fourteenth century was beginning to appear in Italy. These mostly well-to-do Christians edited, translated and commented

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implying at times that ethics was the more important for salvation. Hooker claimed that besides the supreme and eternal divine law, there is a second eternal law, which consists in the order of things in this universe. 'Man' comes to an understanding of this order from his natural experience and by the use of ordinary reasoning.
[176] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, quoting Richard Hooker, p.203.

on the texts that came into their possession, while also writing on grammar, philology, ethics, and history, raising the standards of literary style and historical criticism. In the process, 'they celebrated humanity.'[177]

Renaissance humanists tended to look at classical Greek and Roman antiquity as an intellectual and cultural high point, following the period of decline in the Dark Ages. In place of an increasingly arcane Scholastic concern with logic and science, and the deadening obsession to harmonise Christian theology, they read classical authors as a source not only of ideas but also of spiritual replenishment. In contrast to medieval thinkers, whose work was often performed in a spirit of humble submission to God, the humanists tended to see their own study of classical culture, the *humanitas*, as a way of celebrating human excellence and aesthetic beauty.

In this context, the discussion about the soul, the self and morality derived from natural or divine law, was to take another turn. In the midst of this humanistic celebration however, '*the good* and right for man' were still ultimately determined by reference to the law or will of God, for Renaissance thinking was not irreligious or atheistic. The difference was that even the more religious-minded ethicists at the dawn of modern philosophy, as Bourke rightly characterises the beginning of the Renaissance period, focussed their interest on the individual human person, his or her unlimited capacities, freedom, and opportunities not only for future salvation but for terrestrial accomplishment.[178]

The Platonic character of Italian and British humanism

In the thirteenth century, as we have seen, Aristotelianism dominated philosophy and theology in the universities, while Augustinianism survived among the clergy and in popular religious literature. But in the fourteenth century, a Byzantine tradition of Platonism, along with many previously untranslated works of Plato, arrived in Italy. Petrarch had read Plato only through Latin authors, such as Cicero and Augustine, in the latter of whom he seemed to identify 'the passionate spiritual yearning of his own

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[177] Raymond Martin and John Barresi 2006, p.109, from a quote by Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanistic Strains*, Harper & Row, New York, 1961; Note 1, p.321
[178] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.207-8

soul.' Later in the Renaissance, Petrarch's successors studied Plato in Greek, and during the first half of the fifteenth century, they translated many Platonic dialogues into Latin.[179]

Perhaps the most important Renaissance Platonist was Marsilio Ficino, the leader of the Florentine Platonic Academy. Like his friend and student, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ficino was profoundly influenced not only by Petrarch but also by Aristotelianism. Both Ficino and della Mirandola acknowledged their indebtedness to Aristotle and to medieval thinkers, without entering the polemics of earlier humanists. Ficino exalted *love* as the ideal standard of moral living, defining the love that binds all men in one species as children of God as *humanitas*.[180] This ideal 'humanity' is thus understood as the source not only of the goodness and beauty in the life of the individual but it is also the standard of perfection in the arts and all human endeavours. Like all followers of Plotinus, Ficino believed in friendship as an ideal spiritual relationship for people participating together in the contemplative life, understood as an ecstatic, experiential union with God. This theory of friendship appealed not only to members of his Platonic Academy but also to many others, and was celebrated repeatedly in prose and verse throughout the sixteenth century.[181]

Like Ficino, della Mirandola also sought to synthesise philosophical and spiritual thought, believing that humans do not occupy a fixed place in the universal hierarchy, but fashion their own destinies. His *Oration* was the most famous expression of the humanist ideals of human dignity and the freedom. For the Florentine Platonists, the concept of human dignity was universal, and not sectarian or personal. They celebrated religious diversity, emphasising that religion is natural to humans and that all religious and philosophical traditions have their own true insights. The Church hierarchy, however, did not appreciate this ecumenicalism, and in 1513 promulgated as official Church dogma the personal immortality of the soul.[182]

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[179] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.110-11

[180] We owe to Ficino the term *Platonic love*, which he developed as an ideal of love and friendship, rooted in classical and Christian conceptions of spiritual fellowship, as well as in medieval conceptions of courtly love.

[181] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.112-13

[182] All hope for ecumenical debate would soon end a few years later, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five propositions to the door of All Saints' church in Wittenberg, with the result that for hundreds of years, religion would be the source of a bitter conflict throughout Europe. (Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp.113-14)

Although there was a clear Platonic strand in most classical scholars during the Renaissance, this did not entirely erase Aristotelian thought, and we often find synthesised in their writings the main elements of both Platonic and Aristotelian theories. We thus find the Aristotelian tendency in Italy best represented by Pietro Pomponazzi. Believing that knowledge is acquired by reason rather than faith, he discovered in the new Latin translations a naturalistic Aristotle who denied personal immortality, but believed that the human soul could participate in the divine. The Aristotelian idea that the essential reward of moral virtue is virtue itself, and that this is what makes humans happy, was thus carried forward in his writings, although in Pomponazzi's belief that right action contributes to the universal good, he also accommodates and extends the Platonists' notion of human solidarity.

Most British classical scholars were influenced by the Platonic, rather than the Aristotelian school of Italian humanism however, and a couple of examples will serve to illustrate the nature of this British school of thought.

One of the most unusual, and also one of the better known humanists in Renaissance England was Thomas More. His ethics has a broad Platonic inspiration that supports the view that *man's universal nature* indicates the way of virtue to each person, arguing in his *Utopia*, obviously influenced by Plato's *Republic*, that reason might develop certain principles of natural religion. The following passage conveys More's understanding of natural virtue as he describes it in his Utopians:

They define virtue thus, that it is a living according to Nature, and think that we are made by God for that end; they believe that a man follows the dictates of Nature when he pursues or avoids things according to the direction of reason; they say that the first dictate of reason is the kindling in us a love and reverence for the Divine Majesty; to whom we owe both all that we have and all that we can hope for. In the next place, reason directs us to keep our minds as free from passions and as cheerful as we can, and that we should consider ourselves as bound by the ties of good-nature and humanity to use our utmost endeavours to help forward the happiness of all other persons…[183]

More then proceeds to describe what Bourke calls a 'theory of psychological hedonism', attenuated only by a reasonable concern for the welfare of society:

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[183] From Thomas More's *Utopia,* trans. Ralph Robinson, Lupton, New York, 1890, p.65, in Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.219-20

And from thence they infer, that if a man ought to advance the welfare and comfort of the rest of mankind, there being no virtue more proper and peculiar to our nature than to ease the miseries of others, to free from trouble and anxiety in furnishing them with the comforts of life, in which pleasure consists, Nature much more vigorously leads him to do all this for himself. A life of pleasure is either a real evil, and in that case we ought not to assist others in their pursuit of it…or if it is a good thing, so that we not only may, but ought to help others to it, why then ought not a man to begin with himself? Since no man can be more bound to look after the good of another than after his own; for Nature cannot direct us to be good and kind to others, and yet at the same time to be unmerciful and cruel to ourselves. Thus, as they define virtues to be living according to Nature, so they imagine that Nature prompts all people on to seek after pleasure, as the end of all they do.[184]

While More's *Utopia* is deliberately devoid of early Christian moralising, the outlook of Sir Thomas Elyot is more strictly in the classic tradition of Plato. Elyot translated della Mirandola's *The Rules of a Christian Life* late in his life; though in his earlier work he had set the ethical foundation for the education of a political ruler that follows close upon the Greek doctrine of the great virtues. He quoted Aristotle extensively, while he regarded Plato as 'the most noble Philosopher', which illustrates how these two influences were present in his thinking and that of other Renaissance humanists.[185]

Catholic Scholasticism and Aristotelian ethics

Also towards the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century, a quite different school of Aristotelian ethics is found in Catholic Scholasticism, whose activities were centred in Spain and Portugal, but extended somewhat into other countries in Europe. Typical of this movement was Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican professor at the University of Salamanca, who made in his *Commentary on the Second Part of the Summa Theologiae,* a well-informed study of the moral teaching of Thomas Aquinas. More importantly, his treatise *On the Law of War* shows him as a practical thinker on problems of international relations. Examining Aquinas' conditions for a country to be justified in going to war, Vitoria added his conviction that the good results of a war should exceed the evil consequences. As a consequence of views such as these, Vitoria is regarded as the founder of the theory of international

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[184] *Ibid,* pp.220-21
[185] Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, pp.221-22

law, of which he was a staunch advocate.[186]

Besides the Dominican writers in the Iberian Peninsula, an outstanding group of Aristotelian Scholastics was found in the Society of Jesus. Almost from the beginning, the Jesuits had as a textbook for philosophical studies the *Opera Omnia* of Aristotle. Their Spanish founder, Ignatius of Loyola had studied philosophy and theology at the University of Paris, where he developed a great respect for Aristotle. The Jesuit concept of the education of 'the whole man' owes a great deal to the ideals of classical humanism, and has been developed by many other distinguished Jesuits since.[187]

Francisco Suárez, a late sixteenth century Spanish Jesuit, was perhaps the most important and influential ethicist in the Renaissance however. A strong influence on both Catholic and Protestant moral thinkers well into the nineteenth century, and even until recently on British and American ethicists, Suárez called the Aristotelian doctrine of the finality of human beings a metaphor, thus taking much of the force out of a teleological Aristotelian approach to ethical judgement. As for 'human nature', he held a contextual view of the individual person, which in his teachings meant that 'man' is viewed in all his essential relations. He also held that man's reason is the power in which natural law is known; describing conscience in his later works as that judgement of practical understanding by which a person distinguishes between concrete good and evil and between what is commanded or prohibited. The rules that he provided for the solution of problems of conscience were influential into the seventeenth century and beyond.[188]

The denial of 'free will' in Reformation theology

In a radical turn in the history of moral philosophy, the established notion that 'man' is free to choose between good and evil, and that clear reasoning and judgement are essential characteristics of our 'human nature' - the basic tenets for attaining a harmonious existence in solidarity with all living beings handed down by Platonic

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[186] *Ibid*, pp.225-26
[187] *Ibid*, p.227
[188] *Ibid*, pp.228-34

and Aristotelian understandings of human beings - would be met with one of the more forceful challenges at the dawn of the sixteenth century, in the teachings of the Protestant Reformers.

Martin Luther and the early reformers were bitter in their attacks upon Scholasticism and the influence of Aristotle, 'the damned heathen', as he was called, although it seems that later Protestants were not averse to explaining their theology by scholastic methods.[189] MacIntyre also remarks that Luther too, like Machiavelli, though each in different ways, marks 'the break with the hierarchical, synthesising society of the Middle Ages, and the distinctive moves into the modern world.'[190]

Luther's ethics can be best understood as a structure where the only true moral rules are the divine commandments, but these commandments have no further rationale or justification than that they are the injunctions of God. For Luther, there is a natural antagonism between what we want and what God commands us to do, and since human reason and will cannot obey divine commands, enslaved as it is by sin, we have to act *against reason* and *against our natural will*. We are, therefore, saved only by *divine grace* and not by our works. The importance of Luther for the history of moral theory lies in his upholding of the absolute rights of secular authority while demanding that we attend only to faith and not to works or actions that involve insurrection against lawful authority. His denial of 'free will' in 'man', at the conclusions of his *Bondage of the Will*, written as a refutation of Erasmus' *Treatise on Free Choice*, is a statement of the limitations under which human volition operates.[191]

The belief that we have to hope for grace that we may be justified and forgiven for our inability to obey divine command is equally strong in John Calvin. Convinced of the utter depravity of human beings, he drew up a strict and harsh code of human conduct, in which there is a view of moral law which is antithetic to the whole idea of natural law. In Calvin, as in Luther too, 'a bifurcated view of morality' as MacIntyre has called it, is discernable. On the one hand, there are the unquestionable but arbitrary divine commandments; and on the other, there are the self-justifying rules of

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[189] Vernon J. Bourke 1968/2008, p.235, quoting Giorgio de Santillana; note 43., p.356
[190] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, p.117
[191] *Ibid*, p.118

the political and economic order. The individual is the subject of both realms, defined as against the God who creates him, and as against the political and economic order to which he or she is subordinated. Such an individual stands alone before God, and his or her new social identity is conferred by freedom of choice. In the experience of the Protestant individual there are thus no previously specified evaluative commitments other than those than can be derived from the individual's own faith.[192]

Self-exploration as a way to self-knowledge

In the path of continental self-exploration that heralded Enlightenment thinkers, Michel de Montaigne is a representative figure, as he draws in his own thinking from both Epicurean and Christian sources to develop a process of acceptance of the transience of human existence that leads in turn to a position of self-knowledge. Montaigne was very much aware of the mutability and impermanence of all things, including human life, as his reflections on the problem that this brings for defining what 'human nature' consists of show:

There is no constant existence, neither of our being, nor of the objects. And we, and our judgement, and all mortal things else do uncessantly rowle, turne, and passe away… We have no communication with being; for every humane nature is ever in the middle between being borne and dying; giving nothing of itself but an obscure apparence and shadow, and an uncertaine and weak opinion. And if perhaps you fix your thought to take its being; it would be even, as if one should go about to grasp the water.[193]

As Montaigne saw perpetual change around him, he was moved to say that 'Constancy it selfe is nothing but a languishing and wavering dance.' This life will then reveal as much as any other, because '*chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition*': 'every man beareth the whole stampe of humane condition.'[194]

Montaigne's self-examination arises in response to the terrifying inner instability that the awareness of the uncertainty that life is transient brings with it. In the process of realising the limits to human existence, Montaigne comes to a position of self-knowledge that is devoid of any pretence of universality or superhuman spiritual

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[192] *Ibid,* p.120
[193] From *The Essayes of Montaigne,* in Charles Taylor, 1989, *Sources of the Self,* p.179
[194] See Charles Taylor, 1989, for a complete discussion of Montaigne, pp. 178-81

aspirations. In such a stance, the excesses of moral rigour, as much as those of passion, are also eschewed, and a way of attaining a balance gradually emerges that enables him to live the 'good life.'[195]

Montaigne's perceptive recognition and exploration of his inner impermanence can be seen as an authentic quest for the truth of his own being. The search for the self in order to come to terms with oneself that he engaged in also continued the line of Augustinian 'inwardness' that has entered modern life. This preoccupation with *subjective experience* is the final achievement of Renaissance humanism, and would contrast sharply with that which Descartes was about to employ in inaugurating the modern era.

2.5   Science and religion part company

Natural philosophy and the beginnings of scientific thought

The theological controversies that resulted in the sixteenth century as the Protestant Reform spread in Western Europe continued in the late Renaissance, amidst some developments that led to the rise of modern science. This was also the time when natural philosophy contributed to the ongoing debate in moral philosophy and theology, as various thinkers increasingly focussed on the relation between human beings, their powers of reason and volition, and how these could in turn be conceptualised in a scheme that accommodated both 'human nature' in its fullness, the physical world and the belief in the nature and goodness of God, or the divine.

The most original natural philosopher of the late Renaissance was probably Giordano Bruno, and his influence was felt not only by the Cambridge Platonists, but it is also visible in Spinoza, Leibniz, Bonnet and others, as well as in the romantic idealism of Goethe, Lessing, Schelling, and Coleridge. Bruno's most fundamental idea is that God is not only transcendent, but immanent - above Nature but also in Nature. He believed that the universe is an animated whole, permeated throughout by the infinite

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[195] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, pp. 121-22

power of God, and that all matter is infused with living souls, energising and constructing all the possibilities of nature. The goal of human existence, according to Bruno, is knowledge, and he aimed to know God through an understanding of Nature, and thus to get beneath the surface of things to their physical and metaphysical core. Through intellectual understanding, he thought, we can come to experience God within ourselves, and ultimately, we can even become one with God.[196]

Bruno's radical thinking challenged the doctrine of the Eucharist, and the Council of Trent dogmatically interpreted his ideas in terms of Aristotelian physics. Although he defended his views by invoking the notion of the 'double truth', Bruno was in the end found guilty of heresy and burnt at the stake.[197]

Following in Bruno's path, the thirst for naturalistic knowledge and understanding that Renaissance humanism had brought in its wake did not diminish the aspirations of human beings to reach out beyond their immediate physical surroundings. The notions that had underpinned Aristotelian physics also led to conceive of the universe as a whole as well as many of its parts as some sort of conscious mind trying to attain some purposeful goal. A new view of the physical world that regarded natural objects as machines and sought to figure out how they worked came to replace Aristotelian notions. In this new theory, the universe is conceptualised as consisting of parts of an efficient machine, functioning like the mechanism of a clock. Henceforth, the entire natural world, eventually including humans, would be portrayed in a different way.[198]

This new mechanistic view of the world removed talk of ends, or final causes, from the science of nature and consigned it to theology and to theories of human consciousness. As the relation of human consciousness to the rest of nature was seen in a new light, this also raised new questions, whose answers would impact profoundly in our understanding of this complex aspect of 'human nature.'

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[196] Raymond Martin and John Barresi., 2006, pp.118-19

[197] The historian Frances Yates gives a fascinating account of Bruno's life, from his training as a Dominican in the convent in Naples, to the publication of his first book on memory, *De umbris idearum (Shadows)* in Paris in 1582, with a dedication to the French king Henri III, and a promise in its opening words to reveal a Hermetic secret. The purpose of this book, as in all of Bruno's writings, was apparently to convey his Hermetic religious message within the framework of the art of memory. His reputation had already spread in Frankfurt, but when he came back to Venice, Bruno was promptly seized by the Inquisition, imprisoned and subsequently put to death at the stake. (Yates, F., 1966/1992, The Art of Memory, pp.197-99)

[198] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, p.123

Metaphysics, epistemology and religion had up until now been seen as part of one scientific mode of enquiry, but from now on they would became separate domains from science, making possible the beginning of modern scientific experimentation and discovery. No one illustrates this new empiricism better than Francis Bacon, a contemporary of both Galileo and Descartes, who inaugurated in common with these two other philosophers and scientific pioneers a new spirit of criticism and a rejection of traditional authority that lay down the intellectual foundations of what we can call modern thought.[199]

In his *Novum Organum*, Bacon's exploration of the fundamental principles of scientific thought, he set out to show the inadequacies of Aristotle's scientific logic that he had found in the latter's *Organum.* He argued that Aristotelian logic, being purely deductive in character, provided no method for the discovery of new facts, but only a means of arriving at the logical consequences of what is already known. This classificatory system, Bacon thought, divided the known contents of the world without understanding the true causality that such a classification implied. He proposed instead his method of 'induction', the postulation of universal laws on the basis of observed instances. With this method, he hoped to promote the 'true and lawful marriage between the empirical and the rational faculty.'[200]

Bacon criticised the theory of final causes that says that the cause of an event might be found in its purpose, putting forward instead the notion of causality as 'the generation of one thing from another, in accordance with underlying laws of nature.' He argued that science must always aim at greater and greater universals and abstraction, so ascending 'the ladder of the intellect.' His conception of science as the formulation of quantitative laws was shortly to gain intellectual ascendancy in the wake of the discoveries of Galileo and Harvey. Bacon firmly believed that knowledge is power, and his utopian *New Atlantis* shows his interest in the use of knowledge to improve the material conditions of human life. The impact of his theories, however, would not be felt until philosophy had undergone a radical convulsion, and this would only happen in the wake of Cartesianism, once Descartes had declared that all of

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[199] Sir Francis Bacon, subsequently Viscount St. Albans and Lord Chancellor of England, was, as Scruton tells us, a polymath and scholar of the highest order, and his *Essays* alone make him 'one of the great stylists of the English language.' (Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.23-24)
[200] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.24

philosophy's results were without foundation until its premises could be agreed, together with a method whereby to advance from them.[201]

Around the time when Bacon was putting forward his own objections to Aristotle, Galileo Galilei was busy proposing his own theory of revolutionary astronomy. For this theory, following Copernicus, he ended up persecuted by the Catholic Inquisition. His account showed that the earth rotates around the sun, which was precisely the opposite of what the Church had always taught, profoundly challenging the established conventions of Christian belief which until then had human beings at the centre of God's universe. Galileo's scientific spirit also led him to attempt to explain the distinctions between objectively observed primary qualities and secondary qualities, such as taste, perceived colour, and the many other subjective experiences that are not found through observation of the external world.[202]

As a product of the mechanistic age in which he lived, and preoccupied with the general laws of nature, Galileo did not believe that scientific enquiry should be concerned with anything that could not be expressed mathematically, stating that we cannot 'read the Book of Nature' unless we understand the language in which it is written. For him, the symbols of this language were 'triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures', without which 'it is impossible to comprehend a word', wandering in vain through a dark labyrinth.[203] One of his contemporaries, Descartes, a brilliant mathematician and philosopher, was around the same time equally busy trying to illuminate the dark labyrinth within his mind, where he would find plenty of room for subjectivity, as we shall see in the next chapter of this thesis.

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Our narrative has so far followed the many tangled and often rival perspectives concerning our 'human nature' that became enmeshed as Christianity came to prevail in European thought. In the *poietic* flow that traces human aspirations for fulfilment from classical antiquity till the dawn of the seventeenth century, one aspect remains

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[201] *Ibid*, pp.24-5
[202] With this distinction, he anticipated the notion of 'qualia', relevant today in the study of our subjective experience.
[203] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006, p.125

constant: the search for *goodness*, the incessant looking to our 'human nature' to understand what it is in it that impels us, or enables us to distinguish right from wrong, and the accompanying desire to realise our humanity. As Christian thought develops a mostly Platonic understandings of human beings, the Augustinian emphasis on 'inwardness' and the centrality of God's love as the source of human fulfilment and moral guidance is enfolded into this story. Through the entire Scholastic period, classical ways of thinking about our 'human nature' are interrogated, challenged, and redefined, in a changing stream of conceptions regarding human life and the physical world in which humans inscribe their lives.

From a belief that humans intuit *the good* in contemplation of the love of God, the story turns to *human reason*, interrogating the freedom of humans to live a good life, as some of the Aristotelian principles are revived in Thomistic ethics. This paves the way for natural law - or 'right reason' theory - where right reasoning and right action are seen as dictated by *moral conscience*. Whether humans can see themselves as being free by choice, that is, as an expression of their 'human nature', or because divine illumination is what enables human volition is then debated extensively through the late Scholastic and Renaissance periods. Augustinian strands are then woven into the story that begins to question the teleological vision of man's ends, as an ethics founded on reason emerges, following Aquinas' moral philosophy.

The Reformation contributes another important turn in the narrative, introducing the idea of 'human nature' as corrupted by sin and only redeemable through unquestioned faith in God's rules, through the power of *divine grace*. The stern Protestant beliefs are themselves challenged, or perhaps subsumed, in a new regard for the power of Nature and an equal desire to fully understand all the secrets that the new physics promised to reveal, while human beings also seek in the same rules that governed the universe the answers to account for their own nature. All these combined aspirations, these radical turns and detours can to some extent be seen as also inscribing the unfolding *poiesis* that this thesis seeks to advance: an enterprise that sees human beings as continually seeking to realise their inner nature, as they strive for personal and universal goodness.

The new emphasis on observed particulars with the shift to Baconian empiricism in

science, together with Galileo's heliocentric account of the Earth's place in the universe, spelled the final dismissal of a teleological view of the cosmos and of the role of humans within it. Galileo's challenge to established ways of thinking was born of optimism and reflection, not on culture, but on the implications of the new science. Montaigne's investigations were motivated by the quest for qualitative knowledge of self; Galileo's, for quantified knowledge of nature. This kind of self-examination, together with a mechanistic, or *materialistic*, conception of the world, set the scene for the Cartesian thinking that would change an entire worldview and mark the beginnings of the modern scientific revolution. As this change began to unfold, it gave rise to different understandings of the issues that had begun to occupy human beings, where the question of the hitherto universal conception of humans and what their 'natural' propensities and characteristics consisted of, took centre stage. Such persistent questioning would inevitably be mirrored in the analysis that would soon focus on the personal and the public divide and its consequences for morality - a distant cry from the debates of the much tighter-knit and well defined cosmos of the classical world.

Chapter Three
Reason and morality: From the individual to the common good

Introduction

In the late Renaissance, the more individualistic, person-oriented, relation to God that allowed *individual reason*, *conscience*, and *free will* to emerge, gradually led to an increased desire to understand the nature of human motivation and conduct. The question of whether one could follow one's 'natural' inclinations, while at the same time practising the virtues required to live a moral life, soon began to be examined in relation to matters linking, and often opposing, one's self-interest, to the interests of others. Concern for the 'care of the soul', an *individual good*, becomes linked to *the common good* of society, sparking debates on whether there is an inherent sense of rights and responsibilities in the individual pursuit of our own inclinations that is also compatible with living with other individuals in community.

The new spirit of scientific inquiry that followed the humanistic flourishing of the Renaissance resulted in radically new understandings of 'human nature', as the prestige of the natural sciences spread in Western Europe. With *subjectivity* and *personal morality* now regarded as matters of common concern to all, the *poiesis* of our 'human nature' takes a number of major turns. Our story follows some of these new understandings in moral philosophy, and in the debates that established the principles of a nascent political science, as the seventeenth century approached. By the end of the seventeenth century, *natural* and *moral philosophy* begin to shape the art of government and public policy, as attempts are made to implement the notion of *the common good* in a variety of political and economic forms. In the process, human motivation and self-interest are enmeshed in a wider conception, where personal and civic virtues are redefined and reconfigured for the good of the nation as a whole. The development of civil society then becomes a major preoccupation, as is the determination of the norms and values that would shape the rising ideal of citizenship that was by now gathering momentum, first in Anglo-Saxon countries and then elsewhere in the world.

The extraordinary character of this century reveals the difference between the Renaissance, or second Enlightenment, as Grayling has called it, and the third Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and beyond.[204] This is also the time when the accepted views about the universe in general and about humankind in particular are challenged, as *observation* and *reason* provide powerful ways of describing natural phenomena and predicting their behaviour. New understandings of the *rational grounding for human morality* emerge as a natural development, or perhaps as a reaction to the mechanised view of reality and existence that accompanied the new science. In the midst of such a mechanistic conception of the world, Descartes begins his well-known struggle between a scientifically-trained orientation and a genuine desire to conform to the religious ethos of the time. Out of this inner conflict emerges *the rational*, *modern subject*, signalling a radical change in our thinking about the relationship between our mind's rationality and the natural world, and one that would have profound implications for both science and philosophy, and our own understanding of moral agency.

As norms of individual behaviour, enhanced by natural law, are extended to the public sphere in the nascent theories of political science and economy, Locke's ideas, grounding individual moral responsibility in human reason, empirical observation and general consensus, become greatly influential. The manner in which he regards human beings as *persons* with rights and responsibilities also comes to form the basis of the legal systems of many liberal modern democracies in the West. This involves a profound anti-teleological turn in the thinking about human beings, their rationality and motivation, in which Locke finds a reason in *human consciousness* that enables a person to think of him or herself as a *moral agent* with a distinct identity, thus enabling moral responsibility and prefiguring the modern conception of a self.

Civic virtue is by then seen as a common good, important in promoting social harmony and effective government. The *Neo-Platonic* influence moreover, is once again a central element in Shaftesbury, who links his moral philosophy to Platonic notions of beauty, privileging aesthetic appreciation. *Love*, in both Shaftesbury and

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[204]A.C. Grayling, 2004, characterises the whole of the humanist tradition of the Renaissance as the Second Enlightenment, and eighteenth century thought and beyond as the Third Enlightenment. For Grayling, the First Enlightenment took place in the classical period of antiquity.

Hutcheson, has a central place, and is regarded in their ethic as the highest human good, and linked to a claim to knowledge based on the image of a *universal 'human nature'* where moral facts are to be derived from a kind of observation based on divine order and harmony. The epistemological turn that was involved in Hutcheson's scientific account of human subjectivity, and his and Shaftesbury's idea that our natural inclination to morality is based on a *natural disposition to sympathy*, is soon challenged by Mandeville, who nevertheless suggests a different way of conceptualising self-interest to promote social and economic development.

A new sense of the *value of ordinary life* and of the place of *moral sentiments* to motivate human behaviour come to add around this time to the already complex picture of the individual and of society that is emerging, the combined product of both moral and natural philosophy. This is a picture where humans are increasingly seen as *self-responsible* and *autonomous beings*, with obligations to themselves as well as to others, while remaining part of the *providential order* of the world. This time of profound change is also a period that saw religious wars that tore Europe apart and political events that would shape its history and that of many other countries around the world.

3.1 Morality: a personal or public affair?

In the climate of instability that prevailed throughout Europe in the seventeenth century, the distinction between the public and private life and the relation between these spheres of activity with ethics and politics was brought into sharper focus. The momentous shift that Niccolo Machiavelli had introduced a century earlier, asserting the sovereignty of the individual in their choices and aims, combined in his statecraft with the view that human behaviour is governed by unchanging laws – views that Machiavelli held without any apparent contradiction.[205]

From Machiavelli's age onward it became increasingly possible for more people to play a part in political institutions, with the political order less a given and unalterable

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[205] Alasdair MacIntyre 1967/2006, *A Short History of Ethics*, p.124

context. The collapse of the British monarchy in the Civil War of the 1640s and the religious disunity that contributed to it brought to the fore questions about the foundations of social life and the basis of political obligation whose answers could still be taken for granted elsewhere. The struggle between the restored Stuart kings and Parliament that culminated with the royal defeat in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 would keep those questions alive.[206]

Self-interest and morality in Hobbes

In the fraught political environment of early seventeenth century Britain, Thomas Hobbes explored the relationships between morality and self-interest and the social order, identifying himself in his *Leviathan* as the representative of 'all men', creating a position of commonality based on a set of universal principles, which he defined anew. In his examination of good and evil, Hobbes thought that the only source of these appetites, desires and passions, is in 'the person of the man, where there is no commonwealth.' In this endless pull of passions, he sees 'man' always seeking what is most desirable or beneficial to him. The common good is thus determined by each person *only* by their desires, as 'whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth *good*: and the object of his hate and aversion, *evil.*'[207]

In order to remedy the situation in which he sees self-interest governing human motivation, Hobbes proposes the creation of some form of 'commonwealth' with the power to rule over men's disputes, and whose rules, established by common consent, could be acceptable to all. He is not concerned with humans' ultimate happiness and fulfilment, but with 'those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace, and unity.' In this new moral philosophy, happiness is not linked to the attainment of a '*finis ultimus*, utmost aim', or to an Augustinian *summum bonum*. For Hobbes, these goals are unrealistic, given that:

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[206] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.87
[207] From Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Chapter VI, 'Of the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; Commonly Called the Passions; and the Speeches by Which They are Expressed', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.224-29

Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object of man's desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. […] So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.[208]

The endless desire for power leads men to compete for different kinds of personal rewards: riches, honour, command, pleasure, admiration, and so on. In Hobbes' view, it is in the nature of 'man' to compete with one another for power, to be in a condition of war, waged by 'every man, against every man.' It is only if men are able to come to some sort of agreement to find peace that this situation can change:

The passions that incline men to peace are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles, are they, which otherwise are called the Laws of Nature.[209]

'Man' is inclined to seek peace, as a fundamental 'law of nature', and to follow it, governed by his own reason. However, if he acts according to the 'right of nature', he will act by all means he can to defend himself when he thinks it necessary. In this stark view there is no room for altruism, or even sociability, for the natural 'right of nature', the 'liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature' makes him inclined to act in accordance with this 'right.' The rights of nature can nevertheless be transferred to another by means of a covenant, or a contract, following certain dictates, according to the law of civil society. An appeal to self-interest, to '*self-love'* might assist us in understanding the 'laws' of nature:

These are the laws of nature, dictating peace, for a means of the conservation of men in multitudes; and which only concern the doctrine of civil society. […] And though this may seem too subtle a deduction of the laws of nature, to be taken notice of by all men […], they have been contracted into one easy sum, […] and that is, Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thyself; which sheweth him, that he has no more to do in learning the laws of nature, but, when weighing the actions

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[208] From Hobbes' Leviathan, Chapter XI, 'Of the Difference of Manners', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.229
[209] From Hobbes' Leviathan, Chapter XIII, 'Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity, and Misery', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.234

of other men with his own, they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance, and his

own into their place, that his own passions, and self-love, may add nothing to the weight; and then

there is none of these laws of nature that will not appear unto him very reasonable.[210]

Hobbes believes that the laws of nature are 'immutable and eternal', simply because 'it can never be that war shall preserve life, and peace destroy it.' Knowledge of these laws is thus 'the true and only moral philosophy' that is nothing else but the science of 'what is *good*, and *evil*, in the conversation, and society of mankind.'[211]

With this emphasis on the 'conversation and society of mankind', Hobbes gives us an undoubtedly utilitarian account, in which living well involves harmony in both the individual 'commonwealth' of passions and the social commonwealth, an idea with which he hopes to bring about the good of both individuals and society. This aspect of Hobbes' philosophy would be taken up by later thinkers, in an attempt to reconcile our too-human inclinations with a moral conscience.

A rebuttal to Hobbes

In contrast to Hobbes, Joseph Butler, a bishop of the Church of England at the time, stressed how our desires, self-love and benevolence could be reconciled in a coherent moral system, where *conscience*, and not self-interest, is the guiding principle:

Now obligations of virtue shewn, and motives to the practice of it enforced, from a review of the nature of man, are to be considered as an appeal to each particular person's heart and natural conscience: as the external senses are appealed to for the proof of things cognisable to them. Since then our inward feelings, and the perceptions we receive from our external senses, are equally real; to argue from the former to life and conduct is as little liable to exception, as to argue from the latter to absolute speculative truth. […] And as to these inward feelings themselves; that they are real, that man has in his nature passions and affections, can no more be questioned, than that he has external senses.[212]

In his *Sermons*, Butler put forward the notion that there are without doubt 'several propensions or instincts, several principles' that enable people to live in society and to

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[210] From Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Chapter XV, 'Of Other Laws of Nature', in Steven M. Cahn, and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.244-45
[211] *Ibid*
[212] From Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, Sermon II, 'Upon the Natural Supremacy of Conscience', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.246-47

contribute to its happiness. He believed that *benevolence and reflection*, which he thought stronger than 'other principles, passions or appetites', influence the whole of 'human nature.' It is therefore 'absurd and unnatural for men to act without reflection', and specifically without the particular kind of reflection which Butler called *conscience*, and which he considered integral to our nature.[213]

Claiming that there is no competition between self-love and benevolence, Butler extended this notion to the apparent conflict between private and public good. In an obvious attempt to refute Hobbes' ideas, he wrote:

The general mistake, that there is some greater inconsistence between endeavouring to promote the good of another and self-interest, than between self-interest and pursuing any thing else, seems, as hath already been hinted, to arise from our notions of property; and to be carried on by this property's being supposed to be itself our happiness or good. People are so very much taken up with this one subject, that they seem from it to have formed a general way of thinking, which they apply to other things that they have nothing to do with.[214]

In a conclusion that is reminiscent of Aristotle's virtues, Butler maintains that 'the higher principle of reflection', because it is superior to all others, is what forms 'the constitution of man.' Therefore, so far as this superiority is maintained, 'the character, the man, is good, worthy, virtuous.'[215]

Whether the character of 'man' is naturally virtuous or not would inform a series of debates, within the Christian tradition as well as outside it, for years to come. The focus for human beings would now turn on the understanding of themselves and their actions in the world based on moral principles, and in determining whether these are an inherent component of 'human nature.'

While more theories and perspectives were brought into such a discussion, a scientific spirit was already displacing the centrality of religion. With it, the enquiry turned once again to the nature of the physical world, and questions arose, as they had once in classical antiquity, about the role of human beings within it.

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[213] *Ibid*, p.247
[214] From Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, Sermon XI, 'Upon the Love of Our Neighbour', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.259-60
[215] *Ibid*, p.261

3.2   Following the 'natural light of reason'

Rational disengagement and moral sources

René Descartes, a contemporary of Bacon and Galileo and immediate predecessor of Newton, stands out in this period as a passionate and committed scientist, a brilliant mathematician, and a great thinker. He is also a philosopher who is at pains to demonstrate that his thinking does not contradict the notion that God is the unique source of goodness and morality, to which all human existence should owe allegiance. But there is a different understanding of our capacities and of *human rationality* in particular, in the manner in which Descartes acknowledges divine goodness.

Descartes' use of rationality as an internal property of subjective thinking was to have a profound effect on all subsequent theories of mind. The scientific view of reality that the mechanisation of nature was beginning to impose required an objective representation of the world and everything in it, including human beings and their bodies. For Descartes, that meant disengaging from our usual embodied perspective, and looking at the world in the same way than an external observer would. His view of the '*disengaged subject*', as Taylor has called it, leads to an important consequence for the understanding of our modern selves:

What one finds running through all the aspects of this constellation – the new philosophy, methods of administration and military organization, spirit of government, and methods of discipline – is the growing ideal of a human agent who is able to remake himself by methodical and disciplined action. What this calls for is the ability to take an instrumental stance to one's given properties, desires, inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feeling, so that they can be *worked on*, doing away with some and strengthening others, until one meets the desired specifications. My suggestion is that Descartes' picture of the disengaged subject articulates the understanding of agency which is most congenial to this whole movement, and that is part of the grounds for its great impact in his century and beyond.[216]

Descartes' project thus marks the beginnings of a notion of *agency* that underlies much of the way we think today about our identity and about the feeling of responsibility for our own selves. But in Descartes this formulation is very different

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[216] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 1989, pp.159-60

from Augustine's, and from Plato's, even though the transformation in the doctrine of moral resources from Augustine to Descartes is no less momentous than that which Augustine wrought relative to Plato, as Charles Taylor observes.[217]

The human being in this new scientific conception of the world is the *knowing subject* who *objectifies* and controls, and whom philosopher Charles Guignon[218] sees as occupying once again the centre of the universe. Descartes felt the tremendous excitement of this new perspective as he wrote that endowed with this knowledge, humans should strive to 'make ourselves masters and possessors of nature.'[219]

The new direction taken by Descartes in the model of rational mastery that he offers brings about an *internalisation of moral sources*, where, according to Taylor, the hegemony of reason is defined no longer as that of a dominant vision but rather in terms of 'a directing agency subordinating a functional domain.'[220] This is vitally important for Descartes, as evidenced by many of the statements that are found in his private correspondence, as, for example, in the following extract from a letter to Princess Elisabeth:

The true function of reason, then, in the conduct of life is to examine and consider without passion the value of all perfections of body and soul that can be acquired by our conduct, so that since we are commonly obliged to deprive ourselves of some goods in order to acquire others, we shall always choose the better.[221]

Taylor observes that if rational control is a matter of mind dominating 'a disenchanted world of matter', then the sense of superiority of the good life, and the inspiration to attain it, must come from the agent's sense of his own dignity as a rational being.[222] This is the kind of internalisation that Taylor finds in Descartes, and which has such a considerable place in modern ethical and political thought.

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[217] *Ibid*, p.142
[218] Charles Guignon, 2004, *On being Authentic,* Routledge, London and New York. In this publication, the philosopher Charles Guignon follows the implications of the Augustine 'inward turn' and advances Charles Taylor's analysis of what this means for ethical behaviour in our contemporary lives.
[219] Charles Guignon, 2004, pp.32-3
[220] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.149
[221] From Descartes' Letter to Elisabeth of 1st September 1645, A&T, IV 286-287, *Letters*, p.170, quoted in French and English by Charles Taylor, 1989, p.151; note 16, p.540
[222] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.152

Descartes' radical proposition

From that I knew that I was a substance, the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this 'me', that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.[223]

With the statement above, Descartes argued the certainty of a proposition that to him appeared so undeniably true as to be beyond any possibility of doubt. This proposition was 'so certain and so assured' as to make him come to the conclusion that he would receive it 'without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.'[224] Descartes' declaration '*I think, therefore I am*' is perhaps the most famous proposition in the history of philosophy, inaugurating as it did, a whole new philosophical tradition.[225] A perfect representative of the new scientific spirit, Descartes had a determined resolve to follow the 'natural light' of reason, embarking on a programme of radical intellectual reform which resulted in a change of philosophical perspective so great that Scholasticism fell into lasting disrepute.

Despite the enormous influence of empirical science, the distinction between science and philosophy during his time was not all that clear, and like many other thinkers, Descartes combined his scientific with his philosophical reflections. Human knowledge was, according to him, like a tree, the trunk of which is physics and the root metaphysics. Believing that only through metaphysics such knowledge could be discerned, he urged philosophers to adopt a 'method of doubt', in order to arrive at propositions which could not be reasonably doubted.[226] He thought that a person

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[223] In Antonio R. Damasio, 1994, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain,* Putnam Berkley Group, Inc., New York, 1994/2000, p.249

[224] In this section, I have drawn on Antonio Damasio's work, (Damasio, A.R., 1994/2000, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*) for my discussion of Descartes' 'error', and also on Charles Taylor's 'Descartes' Disengaged Reason', in his 1989 *Sources of the Self, The Making of a Modern Identity,* pp.143-158; Roger Scruton's 2005, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy,* pp.29-48, and on Jerrold Seigel's 2005, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*, pp.64-74, to inform my discussion of Descartes and his philosophy.

[225] It appears first in the fourth section of Descartes' work, the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), in French: 'Je pense donc je suis', and then in the first part of his *The Principles of Philosophy*, published in 1644, in Latin, as *'cogito ergo sum'*. This, Descartes' first important work, written in a style of 'remarkable elegance and distinction', according to Scruton, describes his life's aim of directing his reason to the systematic discovery of truth and the elimination of error. *The Meditations of First Philosophy*, published in Latin in 1641, was Descartes' masterpiece, and was followed by other major philosophical works such as *The Principles of Philosophy and The Passions of the Soul* (1649).

[226] Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.29-30

should doubt all their normal beliefs, advancing two main arguments. The first he derived from the experience conveyed by the senses when one is awake, which he then reasoned could also be had in dreaming. This presented the problem of knowing the difference between what we now would term conscious and subconscious or dream-like states. In distinguishing between what we experience as real, and what we may well be made to believe is real but is caused by some delusion, dream, or other effects on our mind, Descartes' reflections anticipated the preoccupations of present day neuroscientists and psychologists.

In the absence of reliable scientific evidence in his time, Descartes first speculated that some 'evil genius' could well be deceiving him into believing the reality of the existence of an external world. The only way of discerning the truth that his metaphysics demanded was therefore to identify a truth that was in some sense self-verifying. 'I think, therefore I am' was that self-verifying truth, and in his *Meditations,* Descartes asserts this conviction: 'the proposition I *am*, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.' He reasons that he cannot assert the proposition he has put forward without its being true, for the proposition that he does not exist is self-defeating, and to assert it is to give conclusive grounds for its disproof. A similar argument can be mounted for the proposition 'I think', which verifies itself in the very act of being doubted. His philosophy begins from these two indubitable premises, which also express contingent and substantial truths about the world.[227]

The only way of dissolving the corrosive doubt that had beset him was to find the point where reason simply finds the validity of an argument, or the truth of an idea. Descartes arrives at this point through the use of 'clear and distinct ideas', the truth of which he believes he can discern without recourse to anything other than 'the natural light of reason.'

Existence as a thinking essence: foundations of Cartesian dualism

Having established his own existence, Descartes goes on to reflect on his own nature.

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[227] *Ibid*, pp.31-2

It is clear, he argued in his mind, that I am '*a thing that thinks.*' For Descartes, this covers nevertheless a whole gamut of emotions and importantly, perceptions. He thus defines himself as:

…a thing that thinks, that is to say, that doubts, affirms, denies, that knows a few things, that is ignorant of many [that loves, that hates], that wills, that desires, that also imagines and perceives.[228]

The connection that Descartes establishes between thinking and his own 'perceptions and imaginations' is only guaranteed its reality by virtue of the conclusion that he arrives at later in the same section of his *Meditations*, and elsewhere, that God is not 'a deceiver.' He is thus able to characterise these 'modes of thought' as residing in himself, and as such, integral to his essence:

…for as I remarked before, although the things which I perceive and imagine are perhaps nothing at all apart from me and in themselves, I am nevertheless assured that these modes of thought that I call perceptions and imaginations, inasmuch only as they are modes of thought, certainly reside [and are met with] in me.[229]

Continuing this line of argument, Descartes states - and this is what has made his theory a target of relentless criticism, and even mockery - that since he can readily conceive of himself as existing without his body, having a body is not an essential property of his essence. He could conceivably exist after the body's demise, and in so existing, continue to exist as a thinking thing. The idealisation of Descartes' project has been the object of scepticism down to our times. Critics have noted that the idea of the soul that Descartes describes in *The Passions of the Soul*, for example, is intimately linked with the body and thus to its 'passions', and is therefore not constituted by pure self-reflection.

Descartes' arrival at the pure reflective ego that provided the ground for his certitude was at the same time confronted with a threat of nothingness, in the gap between consciousness and the world that the cogito left in its wake, which only divine illumination could bridge. An important dimension to the cogito debate highlights

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[228] From *Meditation III, Of God: that He exists*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol.1, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.157
[229] From Descartes' *Meditation III, Of God: that He exists,* p.157

what in modern terms would be understood as the *subjective aspect of consciousness*, as Donald Hall has noted:

In Descartes' conception, thinking – really *doubting* – and struggling to know, in inevitably subjective ways, is the very basis of being. The self's apartness and individuality are central to an understanding of human *being*.[230]

Despite Descartes' tortured reasoning to prove the existence of God in his *Meditations*, written in1641, in 1663 the Catholic Church put his works on its list of banned books. The break from a philosophy of existence based on obedience to social and religious institutions and divine law would not have been possible nevertheless without Descartes' attempts to bring the 'natural light' of reason to illuminate his age. Whatever we make of Descartes' project, from the vantage point of the increased knowledge that modern neuroscience and particularly neurobiology, has brought us, the shift that he introduces with his philosophy liberates the individual to seek for him or herself, and can be seen in this light as powerfully political, carrying as it did, the spirit of a new age.

Descartes' 'error': the separation of body and mind in the knowing subject

His method of radical doubt forced Descartes into the confines of what Scruton called 'the first-person case.' But knowledge of the first person fails to reach out beyond subjectivity to the concept of an objective independent order, however hard Descartes tried to objectify the world and his own thoughts and emotions. Descartes' choice can nevertheless be seen as a choice between what for him was impartial or objective 'truth' and his own limited, subjective perspective of the world as a doubting, but *profoundly ethical* individual.

Antonio Damasio, one of the most lucid contemporary neuroscientists,[231] excuses Descartes as a product of his time, bound up with his deep religiosity, for 'pronouncing himself in favour of the thinking mind (*res cogitans*) in opposition to,

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[230] Donald E. Hall, 2004, *Subjectivity,* Routledge, New York, p.20

[231] In his book, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain,* first published in 1994 and reprinted in 2000, Antonio Damasio makes a case for the inseparable links between the body and mind, emotion and reason, based on his own extensive experience, clinical observations and experimental research.

and excluding the non-thinking body, that which has extension and mechanical parts (*res extensa*).' In Damasio's assessment, Descartes' error specifically consisted in:

the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensional, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgement, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body. Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism.[232]

By resolving his existential doubt on the side of reason and logic, at the expense of the apprehension of the world through his senses, Damasio argues, Descartes 'errs', failing to realise that being fully human involves our ability to act with these two perspectives always in tension with one another, and that the absence of emotion and feeling can interfere with the process of rationality and even make it illogical and thus irrational. The problematisation of the *self* as a duality, an inner/outer reality, starts from this moment in time. Descartes' effort, though misguided if we judge it by modern standards, was nevertheless, as Damasio describes it, 'a brave attempt to define a human being as one who struggles to know, in spite of the futility of ever knowing completely.'

And yet, Damasio, like many other writers, does allow some room for wondering whether Descartes' statement might have meant something different in his time from what it has come to stand for - something like an acknowledgement of the superiority of conscious feeling and reasoning, without any firm commitment as to their origin, substance or permanence.[233] Or perhaps, Damasio suggests, 'might Descartes' statement also have served the clever purpose of accommodating the religious pressures of which Descartes was keenly aware?' While there is no way of finding out for sure the precise meaning and motivation behind Descartes' radical proposition, the discussion continues to this day.

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[232] Antonio R. Damasio, 1994/2000, pp.249-50
[233] Nick Mansfied suggests that *cogitare,* the Latin term used by Descartes, includes the idea of awareness, or experience, and that Descartes uses it in a way that seems to mean a 'general awareness of the world, rather than merely logical or rational thought.' (Mansfield, N., *Subjectivity*: *Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2000, p.15)

Jerrold Seigel, like Hall, also sees Descartes wavering between paralysing fear, or at least doubt, and bold assertion. Seigel reminds us that Descartes' first love was not philosophy but mathematics, and in the treatise that he wrote early in the 1630s, *The World (Traité du monde)*, only published after his death, Descartes wrote about fulfilling the ambition of regarding all natural phenomena as appearances produced by forms of matter in motion, so that every relationship between them could be described in terms of algebra and geometry.

The 'clear and distinct ideas' that Descartes applied to his philosophical reasoning were thus grounded in the scientific understanding that his knowledge of the physical world provided. Descartes saw scientific knowledge as encompassing all the sciences, including philosophy and metaphysics, and his private correspondence makes obvious his passion and commitment to knowledge and discovery, even as he hoped that his quest for scientific knowledge was compatible with Christian identity and belief, but feared that conflicts between the two were likely to arise. The possibility that his own work might meet a similar fate to Galileo's must have certainly weighed heavily in Descartes' mind, and there is no doubt that one part of his response was an attempt to distance himself from the new Copernican cosmology to which the Church objected. It is not surprising then, that as Descartes became a public author in the aftermath of Galileo's condemnation, the balance of his work shifted so that science had less weight in it and general philosophical questions more.[234]

3.3   Moral philosophy beyond Cartesian dualism

The main problem with Descartes' substance dualism, as it became known, is that it does not explain how two things that have almost nothing in common could possibly interact. Some Cartesian philosophers too came to question this view, which eventually became an untenable position.

One of the most imaginative attempts to refute Descartes' dualism was made by Benedictus de Spinoza in his *Ethics Demonstrated Geometrically*, published

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[234] Jerrold Seigel 2005, pp.66-67

posthumously in 1677. Spinoza agreed with Descartes in that mental properties and physical properties are qualitatively distinct, but he also claimed that each is an attribute of the one and only *infinite substance*, where everything exists.[235] The mind is the idea of the body, and in it, mind, matter, creation and creator are 'the same eternal self-sustaining thing.'[236]

Human beings in Spinoza's theory are part of Nature, and the causal order of Nature is as rigid and unbreakable as the logical order of ideas. God is *causa sui* in this philosophy, and thus we are compelled to accept that the explanation of every event must refer back to God. There is therefore no free will in this view, and the goal of human life is to accept one's place in the infinite deterministic system. With this understanding, human beings are spared anxiety and ignorance, and will experience equanimity, which is itself the supreme form of human freedom.

In Spinoza's moral philosophy, good and evil are simply comparative notions, with good being an approach toward some idea of perfection, while evil, on the contrary, everything that hinders us from reaching that model:

By 'good', therefore, I understand […] everything which we are certain is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before us. By 'evil', on the contrary, I understand everything which we are certain hinders us from reaching that model.[237]

The aim of Spinoza's ethics is to enable us to move toward a more intuitive, philosophical understanding of the process of self-perfection, in which there is no good distinct from or apart from the totality of things, for the attributes of God, infinity and eternity, belong to the single substance which is at once Nature *and* God. To understand God as identical with Nature is to understand ethics as the study not of divine precepts, but of our own nature and of what necessarily moves us.[238]

Spinoza's attempt to found a true system of moral behaviour was based on his belief

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[235] See Roger Scruton 2005, pp.52-66; Raymond Martin and John Barresi 2006, pp.133-4; Alasdair MacIntyre 1967/2006, pp.135-40; and Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, pp.229-306, for a detailed account of Spinoza's philosophy.
[236] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.55
[237] From Spinoza's *Ethics*, Pt. IV., Preface; text cited from a modified translation in Jones, *Approaches to Ethics*, p.203, quoted by Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.304; note. 36, p.364
[238] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, pp.137

of the place of human beings in the natural world, and the moral vision developed in his *Ethics* is the part of his philosophy for which he has been most admired. His theory of human freedom is also linked to a remarkable and unorthodox analysis of the passions, in a way that broke away from the Christian and Jewish moralist tradition that he had known through his life and education. The Cartesian passions of the soul, or emotions, are reduced by Spinoza to three primitive expressions of human feeling: desire, joy and sorrow. Unlike the Stoics and also Descartes, Spinoza does not simply believe that these feelings need to be curbed by reason or will. 'Man', he thought, must learn to be alert to the tendency of his passive feelings to take over his life, and he must therefore try to convert his passive affects into dynamic actions.[239]

Aristotle had emphasised the importance of controlling and ordering our emotions and desires, but for Spinoza 'human nature' appears more malleable. His view endows human beings with *agency*, as beings capable of *self-transformation*. As we form adequate notions of our emotions we cease to be passive in relation to them; we recognise ourselves for what we are, we understand that we cannot be other than we are. To have seen this is to be free; self-knowledge liberates.[240]

The development of human powers had by then become the end of the moral political life, but politics for Spinoza is an activity to procure the prerequisites for the pursuit of rationality and freedom - two distinctively new values that would characterise modern society. His moral vision, like that of many of his predecessors, does have both an Aristotelian and a Platonic aspect nevertheless. Like the philosophers of the Platonic tradition, he wished to locate the final wisdom and happiness of humans in the intellectual love of God. But in order to grasp this idea, his philosophy demanded that we see the world 'under the aspect of eternity', which in is not endless time, but timelessness, and this for Spinoza is also to see God. The understanding of the universe in its totality is the idea of God, and such an understanding brings us to the love of God, a love that is active and intellectual, not passive and emotional. In acquiring it, we come to participate in the divine nature.[241]

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[239] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.303
[240] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, pp.138-39
[241] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.64-5

Spinoza's abandonment of the first-personal privilege as the basis of philosophy is characteristic of post-Cartesian metaphysics, and the origin of the more powerful of the critiques that were to destroy it.[242]

Leibniz's 'pre-modern' individualism

The attempt to reconcile the scientific method with a metaphysics that placed God at the centre of this thinking, rather like Spinoza attempted to do, is perhaps best illustrated by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Like Descartes, this Protestant scholar, also accomplished in history, law, chemistry, geology and mechanics, was a brilliant mathematician and philosopher, who laid the foundations of integral and differential calculus in his quest for 'an algebra of reasoning.' A tireless politician and courtier, Leibniz founded the Academy of Berlin, wrote fluently in French, German and Latin, and produced a philosophical system of astonishing power and originality, which provided the basis of German academic philosophy throughout the century that followed upon his death.[243]

Leibniz's early philosophical training was scholastic and Aristotelian, and although he had moved away from this inheritance for a time after discovering the new science in the work of Descartes and Spinoza, he remained close to such ways of thinking all his life. His passion for deductive knowledge and metaphysics led him to attempt an understanding of how human life fitted into the larger compass of the universe.

Leibniz's own intricate metaphysical system is described in his *Monadology,* published in 1714, where he stated that the universe that God created is 'the best of all possible worlds', a world that contains all the possibilities inherent in its own principle of being. The central concept of his work is that in the infinity of possible worlds created by God only the best is realised.[244] These ontological building blocks,

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[242] According to Scruton, in Spinoza we see the most adventurous development possible of the ideas of God and substance as the medievals had expounded them. The result was a complete description of humanity, of nature, of the world and of God. The weak point in Spinoza's theory is not in its conclusions, but in its premises, Scruton believes, and in particular 'in that fatal idea of substance which Spinoza had thought he both needed and could make intelligible.'(Scruton, R., 2005, p.66)

[243] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.67

[244] It is rather tempting to find parallels with modern physics, particularly in Paul Davies' view that the world we live in is indeed the best possible environment for humans to exist, developed as the 'Goldilocks Enigma', a theory he describes in his recent book bearing this title.

or 'monads', proceed along their own singular path, participating in a cosmic order whose unity and concord are assured by the existence of a pre-established harmony. They are so fully infused with the spirit and the structure of the universe they inhabit that nothing they do can alter its already established relations. This is still the old classical universe, reborn in a language that mixed Scholasticism and modern science, and within which humanity and nature are part of a single intelligible system of ends. We nevertheless recognise in Leibniz a certain kind of individualism, albeit an older, 'pre-modern individualism', as Seigel calls it.[245]

Leibniz conceived of no direct interplay between bodies and minds, or souls, and in this perspective, human individuals appear to lack genuine substance. Nevertheless, his idea of higher-order monads gives him a basis for adopting a viewpoint that complex *instances of individuality* could exist. In this view, even though God had foreknowledge of everything that happened to an individual, there is room for the creature, or individual, to be responsible for its acts, 'and for the Creator to respond to his creature's deeds.' Leibniz approximates a measure of self-continuity, positing a self-understanding that is arrived in reflection through the higher operations of reason. He thus claims that it is 'the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths which distinguishes us from mere animals, and gives us reason and the sciences, raising us to knowledge of ourselves and of God.' Such knowledge elevates us to '*acts of reflection*, which makes us think of what is called the *self*, and consider that this or that is within *us*.'[246]

The self was not, however, the main focus of Leibniz's interest. What concerned him more, 'in thinking of ourselves', is that in this process 'we think of being, of substance, of the simple and the compound, of the immaterial and of God Himself, conceiving that what is limited in us, in Him is limitless.'[247] The self for Leibniz, as Seigel concludes, is thus only a point in the great firmament of metaphysics.

The world that Leibniz conceived as a universe of individuals, whose being reflected that of the cosmos as a whole, was a system that retained its harmony by means of an

[245] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.74-5
[246] From Leibniz's *Monadology*, paragraphs 26-30, in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Morris, pp.7-8, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.80; note 56, p.667
[247] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.81; note 57, p.667

authority that sought to impose uniformity on all. This harmonious view of the world, however, would soon be contested. Voltaire for one, followed by other French *philosophes*, satirised Leibniz's claim that the universe that God created is 'the best of all possible worlds' in 1759, in his novel *Candide*, for what he saw as Leibniz's overly facile optimism.[248] Voltaire and these philosophers thus signalled the turn away from rationalism to the empiricism of the English pioneers of this school, Bacon, Newton and Locke. Let us examine the manner in which Locke's writing develops for such a turn to occur in moral philosophy.

3.4   From rationalism to empiricism: the Lockean 'punctual self'

The impact of the new science that combined Bacon's experimentalism and Newton's analysis of palpable relations between things in his theory of physics made Britain the logical site for new departures in thinking about the self and human behaviour. By the time of publication of Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1686, a growing commercial economy at home and abroad was beginning to provide opportunities for individual initiative, which in turn gave an impetus to the new productive technologies that would soon make England the centre for the earliest development of modern industry.[249]

Leibniz, like other thinkers of the late seventeenth century, took on board mechanism while trying to retain, or rebuild, a *teleological* view of the subject. But it was John Locke who would take 'the really uncompromising stance, the one which set the terms in which the punctual self was to be defined through the Enlightenment and beyond.'[250] In his rejection of innate ideas, Locke goes beyond Descartes, developing a profoundly *anti-teleological* view of 'human nature', with respect to both knowledge and morality.

Locke's liberal politics, in tune with his opposition to medieval science and philosophy, contrasted with that of his enemies, often Catholic or high Anglicans and

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[248] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.87
[249] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.164

supporters of hegemonic monarchy. His search for a new understanding of individuality was also a product of his discomfort with the hierarchy of social relations in which he was necessarily involved, and which created in him a tension between independent thinking and dependence on the relations of patronage, where the cultural and intellectual life of his time still operated.[251]

As a student of Christ Church, Oxford, a lawyer and a medical practitioner, Locke became embroiled, through a position as tutor in the household of the first Earl of Shaftesbury, in the political controversies of his day. As a result, he spent part of his life exiled in Holland, until the 'glorious revolution' put William of Orange on the throne of England, vindicating his political ideas.

But it is Locke's ambitious and influential theory of knowledge, contained in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, that concerns this present discussion.[252] In this important work, Locke was, like Descartes, on a similar quest to understand what the mind can comprehend and what it cannot, though his conclusions were radically different. Locke's starting point was his famous rejection of 'innate ideas', his often-quoted description of the mind at the moment it comes into the world as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, and his insistence on the importance of *experience* in forming thoughts, opinions, and attitudes. His empiricism was based on an unquestioned conviction that humans are active users of reason, and one of his chief aims was to help people use their reason better by engaging in *reflection* upon their experience.[253]

Regarding human beings as free in some degree from both physical and social determination, he thought them capable of determining some of their thoughts and actions on their own. In this manner, he combined the empiricist and the rationalist view in his major work. By taking Descartes' stance of rational disengagement even further, Locke turns towards the very subject of that disengagement itself. This

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[251] *Ibid*, p.88
[252] I continue to draw on Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.88-93, and on Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.159-76, and pp.234-47 for a fuller understanding of Locke's ideas.
[253] In this respect, his position is similar to the one held by one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell, with his brand of analytical philosophy, which appeals to the notion that *our common sense* tells us that there are ongoing objects, and that they do continue to exist when not being observed. This led Russell to conclude that there must be an external world that gives rise to our sense experience.

involves what Taylor calls an 'objectification', or 'reification' of the mind; through disengagement and rational control, the mind is fully within our power to perfect.[254] Donald Hall also explains this process as 'first identifying discrete aspects of the self that require attention', or in other words, '*objectifying* components of our *subjective* experience.'[255] The effect of this activity, involving a 'first-person standpoint', requires in Locke's philosophy 'observation' of external reality, or the reflection of this observed experience.

In *The Self and Communicative Theory,* Gregory Heath[256] similarly explains how Locke derives his notion of the self from his views about the human mind and the relationship of human consciousness to the world. In Locke's view, the primary qualities of reality cannot be known directly, but are deduced by reason from experience. The self in this vision is therefore nothing more than a *point of consciousness* that registers experience, or what Locke called 'ideas.' Heath notes that the expression 'the modern sense of the self', used by Taylor and others does not reveal the fact that there is little consensus about what such a description implies.[257] The manner in which Locke conceives of individuals is nevertheless what he calls 'pre-Kantian in essence', a view that Taylor also holds.

A good many of Locke's contemporaries saw in his emphasis on experience and his rejection of innate ideas a threat to personal stability and even a danger to morality and religious belief, wondering how human beings could be held responsible for their actions if the whole content of their minds was dependent on experience, and thus susceptible to its shifting winds and currents. This fear was voiced by among others, Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, chief intellectual spokesman for the official Church of England in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose similar views on Hobbes were also sketched above. Butler vehemently attacked Locke's notions on the grounds that the following conclusions could be made from his premises:

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[254] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.160-1
[255] Donald E. Hall, 2004, *Subjectivity,* p.24
[256] I draw on Gregory Heath, 2000, *The Self and Communicative Theory*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, England, to elucidate some of Locke's ideas in this section. An avid reader and scholar of Taylor himself, Heath's understanding of Locke is rather similar to that of the Canadian philosopher.
[257] Charles Taylor says in his chapter on Locke that '[T]he subject of disengagement and rational control has become a familiar modern figure….one way of construing ourselves, which we find it hard to shake off.' (Taylor, C., 1989, p.160)

…that personality is not a permanent, but a transient thing: that it lives and dies, begins and ends continually: that no one can any more remain one and the same person two moments together, than two successive moments can be one and the same moment.[258]

It seems that Locke too was plagued by similar doubts about the power of reason to withstand the influence that opinion, custom and desire exercised over thinking and conduct. This is clear from his early writings, and it also goes to explain why he felt a strong need to rely on divine guidance and revelation in matters of religion and morality. Much later, when the crisis of Civil War in Britain finally gave way to the Stuart Restoration, Locke was less pessimistic, seeing reason as able to stand up to the power of passion, custom and interest, and having a capacity to provide human beings with a measure of moral freedom and responsibility.

Taylor has identified in Locke's disengagement a modern self devoted to its own 'radical remaking' and finding its dignity and independence in the absence of any reliance on an order or source of values outside itself. But according to Seigel, Locke was far from positing the kind of withdrawn and separated self that Taylor attributes to him. Examining Locke's other writings, such as his treatise on education, Seigel interprets Locke's reliance on reason as something that was in harmony with the *divine order* disclosed in revelation, a conviction that Locke often voiced and which was suggested by the title of one of his works 'The reasonableness of Christianity.' For Locke, as much as for Bishop Butler and other contemporary believers, the association of reflectivity with a strong sense of God's presence in the world did not cause him to imagine an isolated or disengaged self. Such reflectivity, on the contrary, Seigel claims, was *the source of conscience*, for Locke as well as his contemporaries.[259]

A self that is fully 'self to itself'

Locke made his chief statement about *the self* in a chapter on personal identity in the *Essay*.[260] Although at this stage he is not completely clear about the subject, as he

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[258] Joseph Butler, quoted in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.89
[259] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.92
[260] This discussion, according to Seigel, did not appear in the work's first edition, but was added to the second, in 1694, at the suggestion of Locke's friend and correspondent Molyneux, who proposed it in part because Locke

admits to his readers, what emerges is that perhaps the lack of clarity and hesitation on Locke's part is linked to his thinking that innate ideas undergo changes of various kinds in the life of a person, and the same could then be said of identity, which for Locke has an actively self-referential component.

According to Locke, what makes a thinking being regard itself as retaining its identity over time is 'the consciousness which is inseparable from thinking and as it seems to me, essential to it.' Since consciousness always accompanies thinking, it is this for Locke, 'that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity.' It is *consciousness* that lends a self *a personal identity*, in other words, and the same self exists 'as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought…'[261]

The central place of *self-referential awareness* in human consciousness in establishing personal continuity and separation from others, the close connection between selfhood, identity and memory - since the self extends as far into the past as consciousness of past actions reaches - illustrates some of the essential elements of Locke's thinking, which are remarkably close to our modern understandings of selfhood and what it means to be *a person*. The question of personal identity is thus for Locke a question of *moral responsibility*, since it makes each individual answerable for their life before the proper authorities, human and divine, as Locke clearly believes:

In this personal identity is founded all the right and justice of reward and punishment; happiness and misery being that for which every one is concerned for *himself*, and not mattering what becomes of any *substance* not jointed to, or affected with that consciousness.[262]

Hence, in making every individual be 'to himself that which it calls *self*'', consciousness gives to each a concern for what befalls them, and an awareness that their selfhood extends to all the actions that are recognisably that same individual's. It is this combination of *self-awareness* and *responsibility* that makes a person both

alluded to the issue as a complex and difficult one in the first edition. (See Seigel, J., 2005, p.93)
[261] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.94-95
[262] From John Locke's *Essay*, Book I, p.460, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p. 95

sensible to punishments and rewards and justly subject to them. For Locke, however, consciousness is the basis of an individual's identity only as a self-reflective being and a moral actor. Because only God can have full knowledge of individual responsibility, it is reasonable for Locke to accept the continued existence of certain puzzles about personal identity, as Seigel calls them.

The same considerations apply to the questions of whether or not Locke distinguished between *personal identity* and *selfhood*, since Locke never explicitly distinguished the two terms and sometimes he clearly equated them. When he referred to the connection the mind establishes between any particular part of our being and 'that vital union by which consciousness is communicated' as determining what makes a part of the self, he added: 'Person as I take it, is the name for this self.'[263] Selfhood may seem to lie close to sensibility: '*Self* is that conscious thinking thing', Locke observes, which is 'sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery and so is concerned for itself, as far as this consciousness extends.'[264]

Lockean consciousness, in Seigel's assessment, did not possess the capacity to make a new start, either intellectual or moral, in the way Cartesian reflection aspired to do; it could not remove the self from time and circumstance in the manner of the *cogito*. These are some of the reasons, according to Seigel, to reject Taylor's characterisation of the Lockean self as 'punctual' or 'disengaged.'[265]

Taylor sees in Locke's radical disengagement an opening for 'the prospect of self-remaking', but this interpretation need not contradict Seigel's; it simply acquires a different nuance in Taylor. Locke, in his own way, according to Taylor, acknowledges the close connection between our notion of the self and our moral self-understanding. In the end, even though his 'perfectly detachable consciousness' is an illusion - 'a shadow cast by the punctual self' - Locke's abstracted picture of the self, faithfully reflects his ideal of *responsible agency*.[266]

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[263] *Ibid*, Book I, p.466, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.97
[264] *Ibid*, Book I, pp.458-59, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.97-98
[265] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.98
[266] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.172-3

The disputed grounding of moral reasoning

At this point, it is worth recalling that with the publication of his *Two Treatises of Government* in 1690, written with the avowed motive of justifying the Whig rebellion and revolution of 1688 that put William of Orange on the English throne, Locke had also entered the debate about the rule of law, rationality and morality in England at the time. The question of *legitimacy in government* involved the handing over of authority to a civil power in whom trust could be reposed; this is the meaning of the social contract, which carries with it the important assumption that the authority handed over to a legislative and executive power will enforce laws that will protect the people's natural rights. Locke's *doctrine of consent* is thus the guarantee for this assumption, and this is the doctrine of every modern state which claims to be democratic; but as it happened in England during Locke's time, it also implicitly or openly coerces its citizens assuming a tacit form of popular consent.[267]

Locke's view is important to the above discussion because his own doctrine also stands or falls, as MacIntyre observes, with his particular version of the argument that natural rights derive from *a moral law* which we apprehend *by reason*. Moral good is the conformity of our actions to a law the sanctions of which are rewards of pleasure and punishments of pain. We can therefore discern in Locke's *Treatises* three kinds of law; the first two are divine and civil, and the third is 'the law of opinion or reputation' which signifies the active approval by citizens of what the law enjoins or prohibits.

3.5 Reconciling private and civic virtue: 'human nature' universalised

During the second half of the seventeenth century, writers tended to argue that the knowledge derived from observed particulars had nothing to do with the theories used to support government policy, religious sectarianism, or mercantile expertise. In the ground that British philosophers explored however, a new science of subjectivity that focused on *universal 'human nature'*, and not on atomistic individuals, began to

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[267] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, p.152-55

emerge as the eighteenth century dawned.

Eighteenth century moral philosophers began to turn to science to help them explore human motivation primarily for its social implications. Their assumptions on the *universality* of 'human nature' led to the belief that knowledge about the particulars of subjectivity would enable one to understand the regularities of the moral universe. The search for *the good* in private life thus came to be equated with an equal preoccupation for defining the common good of all members of society. Reconciling private virtue with civic virtue was therefore both a challenge for and one of the main characteristics of Enlightenment thought.

By extension, there was a common belief that better understanding of subjectivity and personal morality would in turn lead to an understanding of the principles that enabled human beings to be willing to submit to government, and thus to an adequate formulation of such principles. Experimental moral philosophy designed as an *account of human motivation* indirectly became an instrument of liberal governmentality. The laws that made individuals social, or 'governable', were those that explained virtuous behaviours, and these laws, informed by observed particulars, were subsequently generalised to all individuals in society. Claims about the universality of 'human nature' were the basis for the laws that were seen as desirable for society.

Mary Poovey has made the cogent argument that the very universality of the subject of moral philosophical science explains why many of the theories advanced within it could also be considered contributions to a philosophy of government.[268] Thus

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[268] In a scholarly account published in 1998, Mary Poovey traces the genealogy of the modern fact in the systems of interpretation that made visible trade mechanisms in early European history, beginning with the practice of accounting. In Poovey's account, the merchant, as the figure who introduced such a practice, quickly emerged as the model citizen in a society where the monarchs' sovereignty was beginning to be challenged in the domain of commerce. Poovey claims that 'the second dimension of the modern fact' is embedded in the understanding of knowledge and subjectivity that developed in the early and late Enlightenment, and particularly in the search for self-evident truths of human nature in numerical representation, whose increased authority, by the end of the seventeenth century, led to the institutionalisation of some kind of record keeping. Thus record keeping and accounting also came to be linked to accountability, and eventually, from the connotation of credit, to credibility, disinterest, and the common good – but most importantly, to the power of the state. (Poovey, M., *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1998, Introduction, and *passim*).
I draw on Poovey's 1998 work in my discussion of the links between self-interest and private virtue, common interest and civic virtue, and the role of sociability in theories of government and political economy during the eighteenth century.

British, or more frequently, Scottish philosophers, moved from observed particulars to general claims about universals like 'man', in a process that identified the 'greatest good of the greatest number' by looking at the philosopher's representative self. A nascent political science was thus linked to moral philosophy in the process.

Following the peaceful invasion of William of Orange in 1688, there was a reconfiguration of political power in Britain from which political parties emerged, and civil society was born. Power shifted away from the landed gentry toward the new representatives of finance whom William patronised in order to wage war against France. Finance capitalists who were politically affiliated with the Whigs offered the king a loan in the first years of his reign so that he could supplement his revenue, and as a result, the Bank of England was founded in 1694, laying the ground for the stock exchange and the association of moneyed men with state power. The bank and its attendant instruments of credit continued to gain institutional strength, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the Bank of England had been granted the further right to receive money directly from the public and to lend it at interest, as well as the right to issue its own credit instruments in the form of paper.

In this context, the question of 'interest' inevitably surfaced once more, in a reminder of Hobbes, but by the first half of the eighteenth century with the term typically connoting *economic* self-interest in addition to, or even instead of, a *political* variant of interest that could be justified by allusions to reason of state. Economic interest thus became *national interest* by that time, since national security depended heavily on the money lent to the government through shares.[269]

Practices of civic virtue promote social harmony and effective government

In the new credit economy, there was the assumption that individuals who were motivated by their own self-interest could not have the autonomy or disinterestedness necessary to practise civic virtue. Various writers of the time, such as Mandeville, held this notion, which continued throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.

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[269] Mary Poovey, 1998, pp.150-51. It may occur to us to reflect that the economic climate of our days is not dissimilar, inasmuch as national security, national interest and international prestige continue to be linked to notions of power, as the latest global financial crisis that sent the world's markets - and their credibility - tumbling down again confirmed.

Nevertheless, a phenomenon soon emerged in British society: the cultivation of what we can call the '*discourse of politeness*', which came about through the likes of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who, with their collaborations in the first English periodical, The Tatler, and their joint founding of *The Spectator* in 1711, greatly contributed to a change in public perception. These publications repeatedly suggested that the practices associated with *taste* - sociability, sympathy, and honesty, among others - could form the basis of a new kind of virtue, which would serve national interests by *promoting civility*. Not incidentally of course, these practices would also strengthen Britain's commerce with the rest of the trading world.[270]

Effective *self-government* was thus being translated into effective *national government* with this new emphasis on manners and civility. Fashion too, indirectly related to both taste *and* credit through its relationship to consumption and investment, was one link that tied discussions about subjectivity to discussions about a mode of government that also needed both emulation and credit. The 'discourse of politeness' popularised by *The Spectator* also took up and significantly revised the epistemological claims about disinterestedness that had been made for natural philosophy, and the claims about the impartiality of political arithmetic.

In the practices that supported such a discourse, the name of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke's one-time pupil, became associated with the emergent notion of aesthetics. Shaftesbury followed in the empiricist philosophical tradition epitomised by Locke, maintaining that all experience and all knowledge is ultimately derived from observation and the senses. Without departing from this tradition, however, Shaftesbury privileged *aesthetic appreciation* over other kinds of observation, considering the apprehension of beauty equivalent to the apprehension of truth.[271] For Shaftesbury, beauty was defined by 'the mathematical criteria of proportion and harmony', and as shown in the following passage written in 1699, it is also closely associated with *virtue*:

This …is certain, that the admiration of love and order, harmony, and proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affection, and highly assistant to virtue,

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[270] Mary Poovey, 1998, pp.151-52
[271] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, p.157

which is itself no other than the love of order and beauty in society.[272]

In Shaftesbury's aesthetics, the attributes that individuals naturally appreciate are Platonic abstractions.[273] Significantly too, these were attributes that only men of a liberal education could aspire to, and thus they came to be regarded as *theoretically universal*. Partly because of the influence of Shaftesbury's theories, abstract or theoretical knowledge was considered superior to concrete or detailed knowledge. Since the former tended to be the province of gentlemen, and the latter was ascribed to those who worked for a living, one can see how this formulation tended to increasingly privilege landed wealth.[274]

These assumptions were also endorsed by moral philosophers of the time. By constructing the knowledge they discovered through introspection in the image of mathematics, experimental moral philosophers claimed that the moral facts this knowledge was composed of were derived from a kind of observation, simultaneously aligned with the visible harmony of God's universe. The image of *universal human nature* thus constructed was the conceptual backdrop against which taste and fashion, essential to self-government, also functioned as instruments of government. This unusual combination constituted the mode of liberal governmentality we associate with consumer society in Britain in the first part of the eighteenth century.[275]

An ethic of love and benevolence infuses moral philosophy

A different or perhaps complementary way of thinking about 'human nature' in the midst of the rising empiricism of English seventeenth century philosophy presents itself in a tradition influenced by Erasmus and grounded in the Platonic school, which

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[272] From Shaftesbury, *Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit* (1699, 1711), quoted in Paulson, *Beautiful, Novel, and Strange,* 3., and reproduced in Mary Poovey,1998, p.153

[273] The Platonic abstractions so much held in esteem by Shaftesbury and his followers were to find another variant in the peculiar blend of theology and natural philosophy called 'physicotheology', popularised by its exponents in some of the Boyle Lectures at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Physicotheology, according to Poovey, reflects the influence of Newton's contributions to natural philosophy, insofar as it elevated mathematically derived regularities - including mathematical properties like order, harmony, and proportion - to a status at least equal to that of the knowledge that could be produced simply by observation and induction. It thus became possible to argue 'that the natural world, which visibly displayed order, harmony, and proportion, embodied God's plan.' This was the position articulated by the authors of the Boyle Lectures, delivered annually beginning in 1691, by mostly Church of England divines.

[274] Mary Poovey, 1998, pp.154-55

[275] *Ibid*, p.156

was still alive at the time. This is illustrated in a group of thinkers known as the Cambridge Platonists, who opposed a religion of external law, couching their opposition to voluntarism in a *teleological doctrine of nature*. In this doctrine, influenced by Plotinus, *love* played a central part, seen by its proponents as creating a vast circle through the universe. There is in this thinking an emphasis on the *freedom of inward nature* in opposition to conventional religious authority, and the ability for individual introspection that allows the emergence of a moral conscience. Anticipating the thinking of Rousseau, the Cambridge Platonists can also be seen as one of the originating sources of later Romanticism.[276]

Inspired as he was by the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury believed that the highest good for a human is to love and take joy in the whole course of the world, for 'tis impossible that such a divine order should be contemplated without ecstasy and rapture.'[277] Shaftesbury's *ethic of love* is central to his moral views, and his philosophy is close to the Stoics, seeing love as derived from our *natural inclination* to love the ordered and the beautiful, and believing that love carries its own reward. In order to reclaim for human beings the innate tendency toward virtue that Locke had seemingly denied them, Shaftesbury asserted that people recognise that certain kinds of action are beneficial to individuals or for humanity in general, while others are not. Goodness is thus in tune with life, while evil engenders a dissonance with it. Moral judgements, like aesthetic ones, are based in Shaftesbury on an internalised perception of natural harmony.[278]

Francis Hutcheson - Adam Smith's teacher of moral philosophy in Glasgow - would develop this idea in the notion that people possess an *innate moral sense*: a natural faculty able to perceive the kinds of valorisations that Shaftesbury had advanced.[279] Like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson also believed in a 'perfectly interlocking universe, which God has designed for the mutual good and happiness of its inhabitants',[280] but

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[276] Some of these thinkers included Henry Moore, Ralph Cudworth, Benjamin Whichcote and John Smith, among those mentioned by Taylor in his discussion of the Cambridge Platonists. (See Taylor , C., 1989, pp.256-57)
[277] From *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*, in Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*, London, 1711; Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1964, I.279, quoted in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.251, note 14, p.554.
[278] This is what Charles Taylor calls 'the subjectivization of a teleological ethic of nature.' (Taylor, C., 1989, pp.251-55)
[279] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.90-1
[280] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.259

in this belief God has now a central role, in contrast with Shaftesbury's inclination to find the reason for believing in the wonder and natural harmony of God's creation. In his *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, published in 1725, Hutcheson notes that since our language contains terms like moral good and moral evil, we ought to be able to locate the ideas which such words stand for, and the qualities in objects which those ideas represent.[281]

Hutcheson believed that we each possess a moral sense, which compellingly delivers to us, through experience, the moral ideas that prompt our actions. This 'moral sense' explains why moral opinions are common to people of all periods and cultures, allowing for local variations with which this moral outlook is combined, and why these opinions are aroused in us spontaneously upon the perception of good or evil acts.[282] This makes him trust the *universal benevolence* of God, the 'Author of our Nature', as the origin of our moral sources. And these moral sources, in both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, are to be found through introspection, in the sentiments we find within ourselves.[283]

It is clear, Scruton remarks, that the *moral-sense theory* is able to reconcile the objectivity of moral judgement with empiricist conceptions of meaning. Nevertheless, it may also, as MacIntyre observes, leave many questions unanswered. For example, what does it really mean for Hutcheson to speak of a 'sense' that has a base in the rational nature of human beings? The recourse to a general theory of benevolence in Hutcheson aims to explain the disposition of human beings to feel pained at each other's sufferings and to rejoice at each other's delights; this is then the motivating force behind both the *perception* of moral qualities and the *actions* that are precipitated by it. The disposition to sympathise in these and all the many other ways we can think of, from our modern perspective, is what later philosophers were to call the 'social' nature of humankind.[284]

In producing a *scientific account of human subjectivity*, Hutcheson aimed to explain

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[281] Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.112-13
[282] *Ibid*, p.114
[283] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.264
[284] Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.114-15. The notion of human sociality will be developed further in the last chapter of this thesis.

why individuals could be trusted to govern their self-interested passions. To a certain extent, Hutcheson stabilised Shaftesbury's model of self-government by anchoring the subjective dynamic of aesthetic discrimination not just in mathematical principles but also in *providential design*. While his primary contribution to moral philosophy, the concept of a moral sense, was modelled on the external senses, Hutcheson, like Shaftesbury, tended to privilege mathematical figures when he sought examples of beauty or harmony. Unlike Shaftesbury however, Hutcheson specifically set out to prove that belief in God underwrites the 'kind generous Affections' with which we respond to nature.

Their philosophical differences aside, it was clear that Hutcheson did not simply want to ground his philosophy in orthodox religious belief, but that he wanted to do so in the context of the epistemological practice that was rapidly gaining authority both within the Anglican Church and in educated society more generally - *natural philosophy*.[285]

Natural and moral philosophy realign human knowledge and belief

The prestige of natural philosophy had been enhanced late in the seventeenth century both by the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton and by the Boyle Lectures, which called on Newtonian theories to justify the argument for providential design and used the pulpit to popularise and explain Newton's theorems. Hutcheson capitalised on an ambiguity inherent in Newton's descriptions of method to align orthodox belief in principles that could not be seen within an experimental practice that privileged observation.[286] This had the effect of enhancing moral philosophy's credibility as both an epistemological practice *and* a theory of government.

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[285] Anchoring knowledge about human motivation in the belief in God's order paradoxically helped legitimate even experiment, especially since, as Poovey observes, experiments were judged reliable when they proved what the particular philosopher believed. (Poovey, M., 1998, p.190)

[286] Previous theorists had distinguished between deduction and induction in order to differentiate between the method associated with Scholasticism and that inaugurated by Bacon. Newton introduced the mathematical method without either abandoning the language of induction or reconciling his practice with that of Bacon, in order to address the problem that Boyle's emphasis on singular facts introduced, Poovey explains. This problem, which consisted in how to produce general knowledge, if facts were considered to be idiosyncratic or unique, was apparently insoluble. Newton seems to have succeeded in giving experiments a philosophical respectability that they formerly lacked, thus supplementing the Royal Society's emphasis on 'experiment' and 'observation' with a form of induction supposedly based on the mathematical method of analysis and synthesis. (See Poovey, 1998, for a fuller discussion of the problem of induction and its effects, pp.182-84)

In this context, the writings of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson demonstrate the early eighteenth century attempts to anchor liberal self-government in a theory of moral discrimination, and like Hume after them, as we shall see, in the faculty that produces taste. These writings also posed the question of whether the conclusions produced from observing the philosopher's self held good for all mankind.

While Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were no doubt aware of the vast assumptions that seemed to lie behind their theories, George Turnbull, who also drew on both of these philosophers, approached the *problem of universality* in a slightly different manner. Turnbull claimed even more adamantly than Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that one could generalise from such observations because one had to assume that what one observed in the self enacted God's laws.[287] He therefore made explicit what Newton and Hutcheson stated but did not emphasise; that what philosophers seek to describe is *invisible*. Turnbull insisted that invisible laws actually operate in the world of nature as well as the self. Just because we can 'see' these laws only with the help of experimental moral philosophy does not mean they are not real; this just means that we need moral philosophy to make sense of what we perceive.

Moreover, because he wanted to make moral philosophy contribute to the theory of liberal governmentality that was being developed to ground the virtue of consumer society, Turnbull represented moral philosophy as superior to natural philosophy:

'Tho natural philosophy be commonly distinguished from moral; all the conclusions in natural philosophy, concerning the order, beauty and perfection of the material world, belong properly to moral philosophy; […]

In reality, when natural philosophy is carried so far as to reduce phenomena to good general laws, it becomes moral philosophy; and when it stops short of this chief end of all enquiries into the sensible or material world, which is, to be satisfied with regard to the wisdom of its structure and oeconomy; it hardly deserves the name of philosophy in the sense of *Socrates*, *Plato*, Lord *Verulam*, *Boyle*, *Newton*, and the other best moral or natural philosophers.[288]

Turnbull wanted to uphold moral philosophy, ascribing to it the same attributes that had been given to systematic natural philosophy. He claimed that moral philosophy

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[287] Mary Poovey, 1998, p.191
[288] From George Turnbull's *Principles,* 8-9, in Mary Poovey, 1998, p.193

was 'beautiful, elegant romance' that enables us to see in nature what we believe in our hearts. As God had ordered nature and made man in his image, Turnbull stated that God 'now orders knowledge, so that we know that what we know is true by its systematic accord with what we believe about God.'[289]

With this circular argument, Turnbull began to naturalise the link between order and virtue that philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had associated with mathematics. He thus opened up a space for *free will*, because in making natural laws and knowledge of those laws the basis for morality, he entrusted human beings with *the responsibility of choice*:

…The result of all this is in general: That we can have no liberty, no dominion, no sphere of activity and power, natural or moral, unless the natural and moral world are governed by general laws: or so far only as they are so governed can any created beings have power or efficiency: so far only can effects be dependent on their will as to their existence or non-existence.[290]

Turnbull thus detached the account of subjectivity implicit in theories of liberal governmentality from Platonic idealism, casting it in terms of *natural law*. Knowledge about nature in this view becomes instrumental to moral self-government, not only because natural philosophy constitutes a religious practice, but also because the laws of nature constitute the backdrop for virtue. Experience therefore becomes not primarily an instrument for knowledge production, but the critical stage in learning those laws that make human virtue possible.

Turnbull's desire to combine moral philosophy with the knowledge derived from natural philosophy while at the same time maintaining his religious belief was very much in accordance with Deist ethics. *Deism* is the movement that applies virtually to all of the leading philosophers during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in both England and France. It maintains that 'man' can reason from his natural experience to the existence and some of the attributes of God; that revelation and the mysteries of faith may be unnecessary; and that *the good life for man* finds adequate

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[289] *Ibid*, pp.194-5
[290] From GeorgeTurnbull's *Principles*, 26, 28, in Mary Poovey, 1998, p.196

guidance in philosophical ethics.[291]

Turnbull's belief in providential design played a critical role in subsequent conceptualisations of human subjectivity, virtue, government, and natural law in general. Like Turnbull, most experimental philosophers endowed the universal subject with a set of assumptions about God that Hume nevertheless would never explicitly endorse. As Poovey concludes, 'in the form of human nature, mankind, and *homo economicus*, the concept generated by a combination of mathematics, experience and faith, not only dominated eighteenth-century British philosophy and historiography, but it significantly also 'anchored the science that was new in this century: political economy.'[292]

3.6   New challenges for civil society in the conception of *the good life*

By the turn of the eighteenth century, among the social and spiritual elites of north-western Europe and America, something that can be recognised as the modern self is already beginning to emerge, as Taylor observes. This *nascent modern individualism*, arising from its heritage of Cartesian radical reflexivity and Augustinian inwardness, holds together, sometimes uneasily, forms of self-exploration and self-control. This is the ground of two important facets of the modern self, that of 'self-responsible independence, on one hand, and that of recognized particularity, on the other.'[293]

To these, Taylor adds a third facet, that of 'personal commitment.' These three characteristics, central to the modern identity, help to anchor the self, generating a new notion of individual independence, and resulting in the new 'political atomism' that arises in the seventeenth century. The new piety that prevailed in Protestant societies at the time can also be seen to contribute a new notion of freedom and inwardness. All this leads in turn to a personal investment in politics through social contract theories. This new *political atomism* allows humans to think of themselves as agents whose paradigm purposes are to be discovered *within*, yielding a picture of the

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[291] Vernon J. Bourke, 1968/2008, p.271
[292] Mary Poovey 1998, p.174
[293] Charles Taylor 1989, p.185

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sovereign individual, who is 'by nature' not bound to any authority. The condition of being under authority is now something which 'has to be *created*.' People thus see themselves as autonomous individuals, but by virtue of their intimate connection with society, however, the idea of citizens, accorded immunities by law in terms of their subjective rights, also emerges.[294]

The valuing of ordinary life and 'the common good'

As a conception arose of '*le doux commerce*'[295] as a property of civilised nations, living *a good life* now meant building an ordered society, with political stability, where sobriety and disciplined production is given a central place. Commerce is seen as a constructive and civilising force, binding human beings together in peace and forming the basis of increasingly polished mores, where taste and fashion also had a prominent role.

The new conception of the individual as an autonomous and *self-responsible* subject is also linked to the Protestant *affirmation of ordinary life*, which brings with it an inherent bent towards social levelling. The *good life* is one that everyone can have a part in, rather than the realm of the leisured and privileged class. The Reformation saw salvation as exclusively the work of a merciful God, and with its rejection of the Church's mediation and interpretation of the meaning of the sacred, the role of the Church was considerably reduced. The rejection of the celibate role of priests and the repudiation of the special monastic vocations that had been an integral part of mediaeval Catholicism meant that *the secular life* lived in productive labour and centred on the family and civil society was given a higher spiritual status.

The distinctive value that the Protestant ethic places on ordinary life also sees the transformation of the notion of *the good* into one of the *common good*. The Puritan way of life entailed *a calling* to be a believing Christian. This was a particular form of labour, a particular calling, to which God summoned everyone. For the Puritans, all callings were equal, whatever their place in the social hierarchy:

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[294] *Ibid,* pp.188-94
[295] Taylor uses this term, a description from Albert Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, pp.9-12; (Taylor, C., 1989, p.214)

Whatsoever our callings be, we serve the Lord Christ in them…Though your worke be base, yet it is not a base thing to serve such a master in it. They are the most worthy servants, whatsoever their imploiment bee, that do with most conscionable, and dutiful hearts and minds, serve the Lord, where hee hath placed them, in those works, which hee hath allotted unto them.[296]

The new spiritual outlook, based on the sanctification of the ordinary life and the promise of clear rewards for the individual and society at large, also emphasises self-discipline and sobriety for the attainment of a common good. This outlook can undoubtedly be seen as one of the formative influences of the work ethic of modern capitalist culture, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world.[297]

The Puritan ethic that valued work and ordinary life was also congenial to the development of new ideas in science. Both the Baconian vision of science and Puritan theology saw themselves as rebelling against a traditional authority that was merely feeding on its own errors. Puritan theology advocated a return to the neglected sources of the Scriptures, and the Baconian tradition emphasised the need for experimental reality. Both appealed to what they saw as living experience - the experience of personal conversion and commitment in Puritan belief, and that of direct observation of nature's workings in Baconian science.[298]

'Private virtue' challenged

In complete contrast to the spiritual and moral outlook of the Protestant ethic, Bernard Mandeville, a Dutch physician who made his home in England, caused a scandal with the publication of a book, *The Fable of the Bees*, which was a series of commentaries, written between 1714 and 1724, on one of his poems, 'The Grumbling Hive', or 'Knaves Turned Honest', published in 1705. As the subtitle of Mandeville's book, *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, seems to indicate, its author challenged the norms of civilised behaviour, seeking to expose the hypocrisy that he saw at its root, by rejecting any claims to the by now established notions of love and benevolence that were thought to be common aspirations of all human beings in any given society.[299]

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[296] John Dod, quoted in George and George, *Protestant Mind,* p.130, in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.223
[297] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp. 225-26
[298] *Ibid*, p.230
[299] Jerrold Seigel interprets Mandeville's challenge as an exploration of the aspirations to unity in a form of

In the *Fable*, Mandeville attacks Shaftesbury's two central propositions – that man's natural bent is to act in an altruistic way, and that it is altruism and benevolence that procure social benefit. In fact, Mandeville argues, the spring of action is *private and egoistical self-interest*; and the public good of society is the outcome of the private individual's disregard for any good but his own. It is purely accidental that the pursuit of enjoyment and luxury promotes economic enterprise, and that this raises the level of general prosperity. Therefore, the notion that private virtue is a public good derives from the claims of those who wish to disguise their self-seeking behind moral professions in order to aggrandise themselves.[300]

Far from thinking of human beings as the social animals that Aristotle had proclaimed them to be, Mandeville attributed selfishness to humans as the essential characteristic of their nature. He believed that social life was an unnatural imposition on human beings, who by nature were essentially individual, like separate atoms. The fact that humans were found living in society was not, according to him, a consequence of social institutions originating in a social contract, but to the role of *pride and shame* in making people conform to the rules of society.

This account of society's origins would find important echoes in later thinkers, such as Kant, who cited Mandeville as one source for identifying the 'asocial sociability' that characterised 'human nature.' With this notion, Mandeville believed that people were led to interact in society by a complex set of impulses that led them to desire the company of others precisely in order to dominate them or overshadow them.[301]

Responding to Bishop Butler, who naturally objected to these ideas, Mandeville refined his argument by making a distinction between what he called *self-love* and *self-liking*, as manifestly different motives that led to selfish actions in humans. According to this distinction, 'self-love' is a passion to preserve one's own life and

selfhood that 'takes in social life as a product of a peculiarly human, but not conscious or rational, reshaping of natural qualities and impulses.' The formation of this self, accordingly, took place inside the psyche, 'where inborn needs and urges were refashioned into a configuration that permitted stable interaction with others.' It is from such an understanding of selfhood, *at once* social and psychological, that Rousseau and others would draw, and it is importantly this understanding that points forward to Freud. (Seigel, J., 2005, pp.111-2)

[300] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, pp.157-58

[301] Jerrold Seigel points out that Rousseau, whom Kant also read, would similarly dwell on this trait of human beings, namely their desire to subjugate others, in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. (Seigel, J., 2005, p.115)

satisfy needs or desires, and 'self-liking' a related but separate desire to value oneself over others and to induce them to acknowledge their inferiority. Mandeville saw in self-liking the root of the search for approval, esteem and honour; it was pride in action, and according to him, pride was the most powerful of human passions: 'the Sorcerer, that is able to divert all other Passions from their natural Objects.'[302]

The distinction that Mandeville draws between self-love and self-liking would be echoed later in Rousseau's distinction between the relatively innocent *amour de soi* and the more dangerous and undesirable *amour propre*. Rousseau, however, would attribute the first condition to 'human nature' in its 'natural' state, while portraying the second as a product of social life. Mandeville in contrast, made *social interaction* a need from the start, and believing that pride and self-liking are innate to individual human beings, 'human nature' ends up in his definition 'made up of Contrarieties.'[303]

Mandeville's rejection of the claim that humans are sociable creatures with an innate disposition toward cooperation and virtue is also a significant rejection of the traditional Christian view, which saw in the preordained nature of society the grounds for goodness as confirmation of God's beneficent nature. The 'searching into the heart'[304] that Cleomenes exhorts Horatio to undertake in the first part of the *Fable*, is very different to the inward search that Augustine calls individuals to engage in, and different again from the religious injunctions of English Puritans and French Jansenists. Mandeville's injunction is an important stage in what can be seen as the *secularisation of introspection*, with its modern understanding of the relationship between individuals and society in a complex dialectic of contradictory passions.[305]

For Mandeville, the interaction between *social life* and *individual passion* was the key to the socialisation of the self. This enabled a model of governability[306] where both

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[302] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.116

[303] *Ibid*

[304] In the dialogue, Horatio begins by believing that virtue is an independent reality and resists discussing the ideas of the *Fable*'s first part with Cleomenes. He ends by admitting that their first conversation left him in an unusually introspective mood, and at their next encounter, when Horatio confesses the anxiety that oppresses him when considering the imminence of a duel, Cleomenes gives Horatio the following advice: 'You have now a very fine Opportunity, *Horatio*, of looking into your Heart, and, with a little of my Assistance, examining yourself. If you can condescend to this, I promise you, that you shall make great Discoveries, and be convinc'd of Truths you are now unwilling to believe.' (Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* II, 84-85, in Seigel, J., 2005, p.118)

[305] Jerrold Seigel.2005, p.119

[306] According to Poovey, Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* implied that the hidden agenda of Shaftesburian

love and socialisation begin 'at Home' – that is within the self:

There is a great Difference between being submissive, and being governable; for he who barely submits to another only embraces what he dislikes, to shun what he dislikes more; […] But to be governable, implies an Endeavour to please, and a Willingness to exert ourselves in behalf on the Person that governs: But Love beginning every where at Home, no Creature can labour for others, and be easy long, whilst Self is wholly out of the Question: Therefor a Creature is then truly governable, when, reconcil'd to Submission, it has learn'd to construe his Servitude to his own Advantage; and rests satisfy'd with the Account it finds for itself, in the Labour it performs for others… There is not one Creature so tame, that it can be made to serve its own Species, but Man; yet without this he could never have been made sociable.[307]

Even as he has an acute sense of the importance of the self in individual and social life, Mandeville is also aware of the impossibility of reconciling the human qualities of will and conscious awareness that seemed incompatible with a purely physical existence. It is 'Our Fondness of that Self, which we hardly know what it consists in' that makes us cling to the tokens of identity and status society offers. This is what enables us to evade the realisation of 'our original Nakedness.'[308]

Despite the doubts that Mandeville expressed regarding the contradictory nature of social life, commerce plays a large role in his views in relation to social and economic development. Echoing Locke's claim, he argued that people were better off under modern economic conditions, a notion that Adam Smith later developed, maintaining that it was normal and reasonable for people to exchange goods and benefits on the basis of mutual interest.

In the various attempts to explain the idea of moral judgements as founded upon the *rational scrutiny* of moral concepts, MacIntyre finds in Locke and his English predecessors and successors, one of the two main issues for moral philosophy in the eighteenth century. The other one is raised by Mandeville's response to both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. In assimilating ethics to aesthetics, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson are both preoccupied with describing the *character of our response* to

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disinterestedness was to promote the cause of Whig lords and to sanction the economic greed that Tories associated with moneyed men, the credit economy, and Whig rule. (Poovey, M., 1998, note 41, p.360)
[307] From Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* II,184, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.120-21
[308] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.122

virtuous actions rather than with clarifying the way in which moral judgements may provide us with *reasons for acting* in one way rather than another. The problem of moral reasoning, in MacIntyre's assessment, is thus left without an account of *how* reasoning can be practical or with an adequate *theory of motives*. Hume, as we shall see, tries to supply an adequate account of motives, but leaves no proper place for moral reasoning.[309]

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Before embarking on a discussion of Hume and his influential philosophy in the next chapter of our narrative, it is important to highlight the radicality of the many turns and swirling currents in the nature of the thinking that, grounded in human rationality and introspection, posited a 'moral sense' as an inherent characteristic of human beings, anticipating some of the contemporary scientific explorations of human consciousness and ways of characterising similar traits and endowments in our 'human nature.' In the current that would push these ideas along, always refining them, often as a result of passionate engagement and further debate, a nascent conception of *selfhood, identity and personal responsibility* begins to emerge, a product of the knowledge where the boundaries of natural and moral philosophy collide and then combine in this dynamic period of history.

As the notion of *agency* linked to *personal responsibility* is increasingly found in discussions of moral self-improvement, and the wellbeing of all in society, the Protestant ethic, with its affirmation of the value of work and of the ordinary life, can be seen to have an effect in upholding these new values in our 'human nature', and indirectly, in the formation of a more egalitarian society. We thus see the application of natural and moral philosophy to theories of liberal government, political science and economics, as *private* and *public* domains in human affairs merge, and our personal and civic virtues are extended and reconfigured in all aspects of human behaviour, giving rise to a better understanding of their interconnectivity, and of the vital links between these two dimensions of human ethics and morality.

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[309] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/2006, pp.155-59

In these increasingly complex developments, our 'human nature' is *universalised*, and human impulses to live *the good life* are encapsulated in new theories that define our natural sociability and natural proclivity to virtuous behaviour. There follows a logical a response to, or an intermingling and redefining of natural laws with social regulation, which in turn continue to shape further understandings of both 'human nature' and society, and lay the foundations of most of our Western legal systems. This is the grounding for the Enlightenment thought that would spread throughout Europe in the following century, and that would mark a momentous leap forward in both scientific and humanistic understandings, advancing our *poietic* account of who we are and of the kind of society that we still ideally aspire to create.

Chapter Four

'Human nature' and morality in eighteenth century secularism

If we are asked, 'Do we now live in an enlightened age?' the answer is, 'No,', but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things now stand, much is lacking which prevents men from being, or easily becoming, capable of correctly using their own reason in religious matters with assurance and free from outside direction. But, on the other hand, we have clear indications that the field has now been opened wherein men may freely deal with these things and that the obstacles to general enlightenment or the release from self-imposed tutelage are gradually being reduced. [310]

(Immanuel Kant, 1784)

Introduction

The thinking that prevailed in Britain, France and Germany during the late Enlightenment, the focus of this chapter, develops in the ground that British philosophers such as Locke, Mandeville, and later Hume, explored. As the influence of these and other seventeenth century British philosophers spread through the continent, *human reason*, *morality* and *freedom* are linked in a new space, carved amidst the political upheavals of the time.

In an unstable and repressive political climate in France in particular, our story follows another drastic turn, as it traces the materialistic claims of the French *philosophes* whom all these earlier British thinkers had in turn inspired. This rising *materialism* is often, though not always, accompanied by a strong individualistic outlook that seeks to further understand human subjectivity, and the motivations for moral action, but that nevertheless challenges the notions of love and benevolence that the likes of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had established as common aspirations of all in a harmonious civil society. Our 'human nature' is thus contested by many new turns and counter currents in the scientific and humanistic thought of the age, which at its roots nurtures a common aspiration, one that had been steadily developing in Western societies for human reason to lead the way to the justice and freedom that many saw as the goal of true enlightenment for all, and that would in turn advance the quest for our moral, or ethical, self.

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[310] From Immanuel Kant, 1784, 'What is Enlightenment?', in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed., Isaac Kramnick, 1995, Penguin Books, pp.5-6

Such a context gives rise to the characteristic *disengagement* of the radical Enlightenment, with its complex mixture of *empiricism* and *materialism*, as new proposals are advanced, gathering intensity, carried in the *poietic* flow that sees human rationality veering away from its traditional religious foundation, impelled by an increased desire to look to science for more convincing, rationally-based, explanations of the salient traits of our 'human nature' and individual morality. In the midst of this *secular shift*, vestiges of Deist and utilitarian beliefs are nevertheless seen to vie for the best way to accommodate science *and* reason, faith *and* morality.

As a more systematic approach to knowledge and to scientific endeavour develops, philosophical practice begins to shed its legacy of theistic belief. Nevertheless, arguments about whether human beings are *naturally social animals*, or whether self-interest prevails in their nature continue, often countervailed by those who like Hume, Rousseau, and Kant, seem to be putting forward something like a strong sense of *innate human morality*, with powerful arguments for the general understanding of individual human behaviour and for society in general. Even in the most materialistic of the French *philosophes* we can find a belief in something like an innate 'moral sense', as Hutcheson had proposed, a result of their interest in the new science. Diderot in particular, explores contemporary theories of medicine and biology in his writing, and Condorcet retains his vision of an *enlightened humanity*, and of the re-establishment of the rights of *human dignity* that he believed characterised our 'human nature.'

Hume's attempt to develop a theory where *subjective feelings* and *collective needs* are successfully negotiated inevitably leads him to face the same problems that beset moral philosophy and the new scientific orientation of his time. The attempts to anchor the foundations of morality on a *universal* 'human nature' would continue to appear in his followers. We find in these thinkers, and in Hume himself, a kind of continuity that marks a natural evolution in our *poietic* account, where the sceptic and materialistic outlook combines with a *utilitarian view of society* and *the common good*, that at the same time asserts the power of 'human nature' and rationality.

In another rather subtle but equally complex shift, accommodated by certain aspects of Deism, British and French Enlightenment thinkers would ultimately dispense with

the notion of a supreme being, privileging *Nature* as a *source and inspiration* for human morality. At the same time, we find in some of the French *philosophes* a budding preoccupation to account for individual virtue and morality, by looking into the interior of the human psyche. The pursuit of happiness and benevolence somehow remains, though somewhat transformed, in this complex picture, as secularism spreads. The image of Nature underlying these goods, together with the increasing ascendancy of science and the spread of education, has the effect of transforming a vision of order imposed externally, to an *inner vision* that has its source and inspiration in the natural world. In such a development, generated by a culture that was still fundamentally Christian in the Western world, the *disengaged rationality* of eighteenth century thinkers, powered by a *sense of dignity* already evident principally in Descartes and Locke, is given pride of place in Kant. Profoundly influenced by Rousseau, Kant's belief in an *innate moral consciousness* in human beings, based on the functions of intellect and reason, also follows in the philosophical tradition that stems from Descartes.

Two principles guiding Enlightenment thought are thus discernable in this tradition. Firstly, 'the image of the self as the ground of all knowledge and experience of the world', and secondly, 'the self as defined by the rational faculties it can use to order the world.'[311] That one or the other of these two principles could be at odds with each other in the thinking of the time has also been inherent in this legacy. The tension between *egocentric* and *sociocentric* tendencies, or between *human subjectivity* and *sociality*, as Hume recognised, constantly underscores the intellectual activity of this century.

The conceptualisation of 'human nature' that goes from British to French thought and that culminates in the attempted synthesis elaborated by Kant proclaims the link between a *rationally based morality* and *human autonomy*. His ideas have continued to provoke and inspire, well into our times. The responses to Kantian thought, not only within Britain but elsewhere, and the manner in which these issues were specifically discussed in the France of the *philosophes*, are also part of the discussion in this chapter.

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[311] Nick Mansfield, 2000, *Subjectivity,* p.15

4.1 'Human nature' and morality: towards Enlightenment secularism

During the Enlightenment, Joel S. Kahn remarks that humans 'do not merely stand outside nature, for since the observable world is now totally naturalised, then man must also be part of nature, and therefore understandable in the same way that we understand the movements of the planets.'[312] Human beings thus become part of the rational *and* natural order that it was the task of philosophers and others to study, and are now also a fashionable *object of scientific enquiry*.

The different ways in which human behaviour and morality can be seen during the Enlightenment are central to our own historical understanding of the period and of the underlying factors in the development of the emerging political theories of the time. Examining the different forms of knowledge in the eighteenth century, Kahn identifies three basic modes of understanding with reference to 'human nature.' The first is *'biological'*, which investigates the properties that set human creatures apart from other creatures; the second is *'psychological'*, investigating the basic abilities and faculties observable in human behaviour; and the third, the *'anthropological'* mode, is the one that brings in different perspectives and where Kahn focuses his analysis.[313]

The first two modes are evident in the diversity of studies arising from a mixture of philosophy and metaphysics, determined by the nature of the knowledge available at the time. The third mode of understanding, the anthropological mode, covers those studies which aimed at the determination of Man's nature and 'his' place in society. It is with this third mode of understanding, aimed at the determination of man's original nature as *fundamental* and *universal* that this present discussion is also concerned. The dominant belief at the time in a fundamental 'human nature' shared by all humanity may now strike us as rather idealistic and naïve, and this is indeed the paradox that Kahn finds in the thinking of most Enlightenment philosophers, whom he describes as seemingly oscillating between minimalist conceptions of human beings and those aspiring for common goals, such as the public good. Within this categorisation, two tendencies in Enlightenment anthropology are clearly discernable,

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[312] Joel S. Kahn., 1995, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture*, Sage Publications Ltd., London, p.25
[313]*Ibid*

the *egocentric*, and the *sociocentric*, which for Kahn exhibit the whole spectrum of human morality at the time. A new understanding of human freedom emerges alongside these tendencies, which in turn brings about a different set of tensions for the individual's relation with society.

The *egocentric* tendency of Enlightenment anthropology sees human behaviour as stemming entirely from personal needs and desires. Those who in this period see 'human nature' as largely egocentric will find the need for political institutions capable of exercising control over unruly individuals, in order to maximise the sum total of human happiness, rather than the happiness of particular individuals. Such is the case with Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian theories, which Kahn sees as representative of this tendency. The egocentric tendency in turn leads to the modern technologies of repressive governmentality that Foucault has so eloquently critiqued.[314]

In the *sociocentric* view, only some human behaviour can be described in those terms, since there is also room for *a natural affection* for others, a 'social love.' The view of an innate human morality as essentially sociocentric is already found, as we have seen, in Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, as well as in other writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, including in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and in the thought of Thomas Jefferson.[315]

The new understanding of freedom and morality that these two tendencies brought along meant that the individual subject was now free to express his/her 'human nature' most fully, in accordance with the sociocentric view, while for 'the minimalist', this meant to be free to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. In both of these views nevertheless, all social, political and religious institutions needed to be judged according to whether they did or did not hinder the *autonomy of the individual subject*, and thus had to be evaluated according to the principles of reason and their effects on human individuality.[316]

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[314] *Ibid,* p.26
[315] *Ibid*, p.27
[316] *Ibid*

Eighteenth century Deism on the path to naturalism

The tensions between the egocentric and a sociocentric impulse that Kahn finds in this century are similarly described by Charles Taylor, who claims that the *ethic of the 'radical Aufklärer'*[317] is one purely based on *utility*, as people in this period, like in any other, desire happiness or pleasure and the absence of pain, and the only issue was how to maximise happiness. During the eighteenth century, a morality based on the providential order had simply lost the force that it once had, but Taylor nevertheless finds the 'radical utilitarians' of the period 'if anything even more strongly committed to the life goods that this order had underpinned.'[318]

Taylor sees three of these life goods as central to the outlook of the Enlightenment thinkers, and of their ideals. The first one, the ideal of *self-responsible reason*, entailing freedom from all authority, is linked with a notion of dignity; the second is the notion that the *ordinary fulfilments* that we seek by nature, such as those we derive from the pursuit of happiness in the characteristic human way, have a central significance and are worthy of being pursued and furthered; and the third is the ideal of *universal and impartial benevolence*.[319]

Taylor warns against the oversimplified view of the radical Enlightenment, with the move from Deism to materialism, from providentialism to utilitarianism, conceived as powered by epistemological reasons. The facile view that secularisation 'flows naturally from the progress of science and reason' would leave out the force of attraction of the other two life goods, the pursuit of happiness and benevolence, and *the image of nature* which underlay them.[320] In their affirmation of the rights of nature, and in stressing the physical nature of human desire and the value of ordinary life, Taylor sees the Enlightenment thinkers enhancing these goods as they negate their supposed foundation. The growth of scientific rationality is thus a kind of victory

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[317] Taylor explains his use of this term as he begins the discussion on the 'Radical Enlightenment', in his first note to this chapter. He explains '*aufklärer*', the Germanism that Taylor settles for, as meaning 'thinker (or proponent) of the Enlightenment.' In this, Taylor follows the precedent that the French term '*philosophe*' establishes, and claims that his coinage is also justified because there seems to be no single noun carrying this sense in English. (Taylor, C., 1989, p.321; note 1, p.564)
[318] CharlesTaylor, 1989, pp.321-22
[319] *Ibid*
[320] *Ibid,* pp.322-23

over egoism, since it allows the self to be free to pursue the universal good.[321]

Eighteenth-century Deism however, did prepare the way for the radical Enlightenment. Although the reference to God in these views is not wholly absent, it seems to be subordinate to a conception of happiness which is defined purely in human terms.[322] The *anthropocentric shift* concerning the ends of human life represented in the Deist understanding of God and his relation to the world is what Taylor has called 'the impersonal order.'[323]

The Deist rewriting of the Christian faith, in Taylor's account, stands in two lines of theological development: the Erasmian definition of God's goodness in terms of his beneficence to mankind; and the anti-hierarchical affirmation of ordinary life. This evolution highlights the central place accorded to the *human subject* as an *autonomous user of reason*, as clearly seen by the major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Deism also finds some of its roots in Reform theology, as we saw with the case of Locke, and the high French Enlightenment sees itself as aligned against the terrible misanthropic effects of the doctrine of original sin. It is thus a natural progression from the suppression of the notion of grace in Deism to the *naturalism* that replaces it. In this respect, the good that God wills, Taylor claims, comes more and more to centre on natural good alone.[324]

4.2   Reason and moral sentiment in Hume's new moral foundations

Around the same time as Diderot was about to reach rather devastating conclusions about human freedom, the Scottish philosopher David Hume, also a friend of Diderot, was busy expounding his own more sympathetic and organic view of the relationship between individual development and social interaction. Hume was the most influential of the eighteenth century empiricists, and this tendency is clear from the

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[321] *Ibid,* pp.327-31
[322] *Ibid,* p.267
[323] Charles Taylor 2007, *A Secular Age*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, p.271. In this recent publication, as in his 1989 *Sources of the Self,* Taylor is concerned to emphasise the continuation of a theistic perspective in his discussion of 'Providential Deism.' This point will be taken up further in the next chapter of this thesis.
[324] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.247

title page of the *Treatise of Human Nature,* his philosophical masterpiece, published in 1739, which Hume describes as 'An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.'[325]

Like Hutcheson and Turnbull, Hume vowed to ground his 'science of Man' on 'experience and observation', but unlike them, he did not believe that philosophers could deduce the 'ultimate original qualities of human nature' from any hypothesis, including one based on providential design. Keenly aware of the problems that experimental moral philosophy had encountered while trying to anchor its foundations on a universal 'human nature', and of the many previous attempts to provide a basis for the moral sense that seemed to be present in all rational human beings, Hume wrote in the first section of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, which he regarded as his best work on ethics:

There has been a controversy started of late, much better worth examination, concerning the general foundation of Morals; whether they be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense; whether, like all sound judgement of truth and falsehood, they should be the same to every rational intelligent being; or whether, like the perception of beauty and deformity, they be founded entirely on the particular fabric and constitution of the human species.[326]

Hume is here clearly concerned with elucidating the controversy that surrounded the foundations of morals. He begins by tracing the efforts of 'the ancient philosophers' who despite their affirmation 'that virtue is nothing but conformity to reason', considered *taste and sentiment* as the sources of morality. He looks next at the 'modern enquirers' of his time, who endeavoured to 'account for these distinctions by metaphysical reasonings, and by deductions from the most abstract principles of the understanding', to conclude that such diverse views only have the effect of causing confusion. Even 'the elegant Lord Shaftesbury', who Hume says 'adhered to the principles of the ancients' is not spared, since Hume sees him as not entirely free from the same confusion.

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[325] This book, written when Hume was only 28, remained unsurpassed by his later writings, but as Roger Scruton tells us, it fell, in Hume's words 'dead-born from the press' and was the first of many disappointments. (Scruton, R., 2005, p.121)
[326] From David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section I, 'Of the General Principles of Morals', in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.262

Hume then proposes a series of arguments to determine whether *reason or sentiment* should be taken as the origins of our moral distinctions. The method that he invokes is a consideration of 'every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners.' In an argument reminiscent of Mandeville, Hume proposes to reflect on how 'mental qualities' form what is understood as 'Personal Merit'; in other words, what is valued, or desirable for any person living in society. The manner in which these decisions can be taken is by *personal introspection*, the kind of universal sensibility that:

…gives a philosopher sufficient assurance, that he can never be considerably mistaken in framing the catalogue, or incur any danger of misplacing the objects of his contemplation: he needs only enter into his breast for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him, and whether such or such an imputation would proceed from a friend or an enemy.[327]

At the end of this section, Hume recognises that to observe those universal principles 'from which all censure or approbation is ultimately derived', he must appeal to the experimental method of *deduction:*

As this is a question of fact, not of abstract science, we can only expect success, by following the experimental method, and deducing general maxims from a comparison of particular instances.[328]

The 'other scientific method', which Hume regards as not suitable for the task, is the method of *induction*.

…where a general abstract principle is first established, and is afterwards branched out into a variety of inferences and conclusions, may be more perfect in itself, but suits less the imperfection of human nature, and is a common source of illusion and mistake in this as well as in other subjects. Men are now cured of their passion for hypotheses and systems in natural philosophy, and will hearken to no arguments but those which are derived from experience.[329]

Favouring arguments 'derived from experience', Hume hopes that every system of

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[327] *Ibid*, p.263
[328] *Ibid,* p.264
[329] *Ibid*

ethics not founded 'on fact and observation' is conclusively rejected. Later on, he attempts a resolution to the problem of the *foundations of morality* in the Appendix of the same treatise, claiming that *reason* - which he allies to judgement - and *taste*, having been shown to have distinct boundaries, should nevertheless be considered as *complementary* in originating morals. Summing up his arguments for such a conclusion, he states:

The former [*reason*] conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter [*taste*] gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery: Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition.[330]

There is, in the closing analysis of Hume's *Enquiry* however, what can be read as a strong suggestion that both deduction and induction play a role in leading us to discover the moral sources revealed both by reason and taste:

From circumstances and relations, known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and unknown: after all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation. The standard of the one, being founded on the nature of things, is eternal and inflexible, even by the will of the Supreme Being: the standard of the other, arising from the internal frame and constitution of animals, is ultimately derived from that Supreme Will, which bestowed on each being its peculiar nature, and arranged the several classes and orders of existence.[331]

The essay as a generalised standard of taste and human behaviour

Towards the end of the 'Appendix' to his *Treatise*, Hume identifies what he had come to see as the unresolvable contradiction in his inquiry:

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent, nor is it possible to renounce either

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[330] From Appendix I, 'Concerning Moral Sentiment', David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* in, Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie*,* 2002, p.286
[331] *Ibid*

of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.[332]

The impasse that concludes Hume's *Treatise* is the problem of induction, which according to Poovey stalemates the 'moral philosophical agenda' of producing general and demonstrable knowledge about the human mind from observed particulars. As an experimental philosopher, Hume insisted that the observed particular was vital, but he would not supplement experience with belief because he could not explain belief by reference to experience, even though he claimed to *feel* what made belief true and not a fiction.[333]

Hume seems to admit that the problem of induction constitutes a dead end: 'I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent,'[334] he wrote. Faced with this contradiction, he turns instead to the essay, the genre that was gaining popularity at the time, immediately after relinquishing the unfinished *Treatise*. In this form of conversation, he hoped to engage his readers, presenting different sides of an argument and thereby consulting behaviours in the common course of the world, instead of simply looking inward.[335] Because he doubted that moral philosophers could assume a position outside the subject of their own experiments, Hume thought that observation was always in danger of being influenced by the self-consciousness that inevitably accompanied introspection. The essay is thus Hume's attempt to counteract the effect of self-involvement by opening his thinking to a wider audience, as he would later in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* with his treatment of the social virtues.[336]

In Hume's mature work, his early Stoicism, with its self-denying and self-discipline aspects, yielded to a more cheerful allegiance to the *sociable virtues*. Hume enjoyed the fellowship and the pleasures of society as the chief goods for mankind, and saw it

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[332] From David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, 678, quoted by Mary Poovey, 1998, p.201
[333] Mary Poovey, 1998, pp.202-3
[334] From David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature,* 678, quoted by Mary Poovey, 1998, p.203
[335] The eighteenth century, we must remember, is the time when print media became more widely available, followed by the emergence of different forms of writing, including the novel; thus the popularity of England's first periodicals, The Tatler and *The Spectator*, for which both Addison and Steele were mostly responsible.
[336] This is part of Hume's *Enquiries* was written between 1748 and 1751, as a shorter and modified version of the *Treatise*, according to Roger Scruton, 2005, p.121. In the numerous essays that he wrote between 1740 and his death in 1776, Hume sought to cultivate a stylistic practice infused with philosophical and moral import, to supplement or even compensate for the limitations of experimental moral philosophy.

as a virtue if an individual possessed, or at least tried to cultivate, the required characteristics. Rejoicing in the common life and conversation, he believed that the tasks of enquiry and reflection belonged to the world at large. And cultivation of the essay genre was Hume's vehicle for engaging the known world that his avowedly leisurely and privileged audience encompassed.[337]

Hume's influence on the emerging theories of political science at the time, as Poovey remarks, lies in his claim that *a generalised standard*, anchored on a particular definition of taste and human motivation, could be agreed upon to arrive at consensus on matters on human action and behaviour. In this respect, Hume's sociability, based as it was on a universal 'human nature' for which collectively agreed on standards would serve as adequate and decisive, can be seen as also providing the framework necessary for government. David Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' is illustrative of the eighteenth-century efforts to 'theorize the human motivations that underwrote government by emulation.'[338]

Moral sentiments and natural and social virtues guiding human motivation

In his desire to derive the principles of ethics from fact and observation, Hume was confronted with the problem of *reconciling reason and morality*. He claimed that reason alone, as we have seen, 'is no motive to action.' All reason can do, Hume believed, is to present us with a picture of the means to given ends; it cannot persuade us either to adopt those ends or to reject them. Reason is confined in its operation to matters of fact and the relations among ideas, and as such, cannot *motivate* us to *action*. This is why Hume says that it is therefore 'not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.'[339]

It seems then that what we take to be *practical reasoning* is simply the working out of the best means to satisfy the desires that have their origin not in reason, but in *passion*. Hume therefore concludes that: 'Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey

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[337] Mary Poovey, 1998, p.203
[338] *Ibid*, p.170
[339] Roger Scruton, 2005, p.132

them.'[340] In the Appendix to his *Treatise*, Hume had discounted reason for being 'cool and disengaged' as a motive for action, as we have seen. In giving *the passions* a prominent role in human motivation, Hume seems in a way to be anticipating the latest scientific findings that have confirmed that 'the passions', or what we would now call *emotions*, have a crucial role in guiding human action and behaviour.[341]

Hume's insight thus sees *reason* as *a tool* that is used by our desires to motivate action; and in this view, his assertion begins to make more sense. As a product of the intellectual environment of his time, Hume insists that there is a basic uniformity of *moral sentiment* among human beings. Like his British counterparts, he also thought that in every period of history, people have been drawn to favour some things and to disapprove of others through their *innate* disposition, which is inseparable from the proclivity of our 'human nature' *to sympathise* with our fellow beings.

It is from the *sentiment of sympathy*, the origin and object of which lies in man's *sociality*, and from the benevolence which makes that condition possible, that the world comes to appear to us as decked out in the colours of morality, as Scruton observes.[342] In his *Enquiry*, Hume devotes entire sections to the consideration of the *social virtues* where benevolence and justice seem to top his account. As in his predecessors, Hume attaches the notion of approbation, but more significantly, that of 'utility' to the effect that the social virtues that he most values have on society, believing:

…that no qualities are more intitled to the general good-will and approbation of mankind than beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection and public spirit, or whatever proceeds from a tender sympathy with others, and a generous concern for our kind and species. These wherever they appear, seem to transfuse themselves, in a manner, into each beholder, and to call forth, in their own behalf, the same favourable and affectionate sentiments, which they exert on all around.[343]

Conscious of the fact that the mention of utility might raise suspicion in his readers, as

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[340] From Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ch.63, quoted in van Stan van Hooft, 2006, p.86
[341] Antonio Damasio, mentioned in the previous chapter, is one such contributor in this respect, but there are many others, such as the founder of AI, Marvin Minsky, who has also arrived at similar conclusions, as well as other philosophers and scientists discussed throughout this thesis. In this sense, Hume seems to be also anticipating aspects of the work of such notable pioneers as Freud and Darwin.
[342] Roger Scruton 2005, p.133
[343] From David Hume, 'Of Benevolence', Part I, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* in Steven M. Cahn, and Peter Markie, 2002, p.265

it may well be equated with selfishness, Hume reasons that if 'usefulness be a source of moral sentiment, and if this usefulness be not always considered with a reference to self,' it follows, he concludes, thereby extending this notion beyond self-interest, 'that everything, which contributes to the happiness of society, recommends itself directly to our approbation and good-will. Here is a principle, which accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality.'[344]

The *principle of utility* also serves Hume's purpose in thinking of *justice*, and the rule of law, as extending beyond the individual to the whole of society. Thus public interest and utility can be connected in order to maximise social benefit and create happiness and well-being for all members of civil society.

For Hume then, our moral judgements are principally directed at the virtues and vices of the human character, in which he distinguishes two kinds of virtues, the natural and the 'artificial', with the latter dependent on social conventions. *Artificial virtues* thus consist in conformity to socially adopted norms, and include justice, chastity and the observance of various kinds of duty, as for example, adhering to laws and agreements. The *natural virtues* Hume thought are widely diffused among human beings because they are part of the *innate human endowment*. They include friendship, faithfulness, generosity, courage, mercy, fairness, patience, good humour, perseverance, prudence and kindness. Included in these natural virtues, Hume sees the '*sociable virtues*' of good-nature, cleanliness, decorum and others that cannot be said to depend on an individual's will.[345]

Hume had once significantly remarked, in a letter to Francis Hutcheson, that his favourite author on morality was Cicero. The contrast between Ciceronian and Christian views taught him that virtues are what bring pleasure to their possessors or to others, and that they are genuinely useful in the promotion of good fellowship.[346]

In his description of the moral sentiments we can see that Hume drew heavily on the

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[344] From David Hume, 'Why Utility Pleases', Part 1, *An Enquiry,* in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.277
[345] A.C. Grayling, 2004, p.148
[346] *Ibid*, pp.149-50. Hume apparently also wrote in the same letter that: 'celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues' he wholeheartedly rejected, since he claimed 'they stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper.'

analysis of moral feelings given by Aristotle, Hutcheson, and to some extent, Spinoza. His perception of the complexity of these feelings and his attempt to give a truthful account of their significance led to a system of ethics which mitigated his scepticism about the place of reason in determining human action. His picture of '*the good life for man*' is thus not wholly dissimilar from that already defended by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.

By extending his naturalism into the realm of ethics, moreover, Hume produced a moral philosophy that to some extent provides answers to moral scepticism. His discounting of personal interest leads him to put forward the notion that as social beings, we respond with sympathy to the needs and approval of others, so that collectively, our moral sentiments provide a far stronger force than any individual passion and lead to the kind of public constraints on conduct that are embodied in custom and law.[347]

Hume's ideas, as well as those of his British predecessors, would be taken up by his French counterparts. In such a different context from that in Britain, such thinking would inevitably follow quite a different trajectory, and one that we examine next.

4.3   The Enlightenment of the '*philosophes*'

In Britain, the growing prosperity that followed the Stuart Restoration and the consequent expansion of commerce and religious toleration had created a space for free individual activity and autonomy. The French Enlightenment, however, unfolded in quite a different context. In France, the monarchy and the Catholic Church retained tighter control over public action and expression, and the government exercised a much stronger censorship over publications than across the Channel. In such a situation, relations between nobles and commoners were full of tension, and the Enlightenment took on a more markedly oppositional character.

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[347] Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.133-4

Early French Enlightenment: materialism and empiricism

In England itself, Butler's disapproval of Locke's thinking was seen as providing arguments against traditional philosophy and metaphysics. These issues were more highly politicised in France, where materialism played a more coherent role, and where many of the French writers and thinkers who followed this practice were seen as enemies of the Church and critics of the aristocracy, the monarchy, or both.[348]

One of the more influential among the French *philosophes* was the Abbé Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, whose thinking, like most of his contemporaries, was in line with the general Enlightenment project of reforming ideas about humanity, nature and society. Both in his 1746 *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines (Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge)* and in the *Traité des sensations*, *(Treatise on Sensations)* published in 1754, Condillac followed the Lockean doctrine that *all knowledge* has its origins in *sense-experience*. In the first one, he discussed the various faculties of the mind, and provided a history of human language and culture, together with a proposal on how to free the mind from the errors of the past. In the *Treatise,* Condillac argued that all the operations of the mind can evolve from pure sensory experience.[349]

Although rooting human psychology more fully in bodily nature than Locke with his claim that sense experience was the source not just of ideas but also of *the intellectual faculties*, Condillac nevertheless denied that his philosophy was materialistic, positing the idea of the mind's pre-fall state as the only form in which its essential nature could appear; in other words, as a soul. He also claimed that sensations do not cause the activity of the mind, but only provide 'occasions' for it; a view that aimed to show that the mind still had full agency. Using rationalist and empiricist arguments to establish the importance of the human faculties, he concludes in his *Treatise* that *freedom*, no less than memory and *judgement*, can arise out of sensation and the experience it brings. By pressing this empiricism as far as he did however, Condillac came closer than Locke had to denying the soul's non-material nature, and thus its

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[348] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.172-3
[349] Using the famous figure of the statue-man that acquires one by one each of the five human senses, sometimes separately, sometimes in combination, Condillac attempted to show how the powers of understanding, imagination and judgement could develop.

ability to survive death. On the other hand, by insisting on the spirituality of the soul, he shielded himself against his religious critics.[350]

Sense experience is also central to the theory of language that Condillac developed. He thought that language evolved first out of sense experience and bodily need, arguing that as soon as people had the use of conventional linguistic signs, they became capable of calling up earlier happenings and the feelings or thoughts they evoked at will.[351] Conventional signs gave people control over their memory and imagination, and with remarkable prescience, he argued that this mental self-governance reached its height in reflection. Once reflection appears, he claimed, 'we begin to glimpse everything of which the mind is capable.'[352] In this way, *language* and the *reflection* that this faculty enables, becomes for Condillac the foundation of all human intellectual progress, the engine of civilisation.

Condillac's *mechanistic perspective* on bodily nature did not, however, allow for reflection as a faculty independent of sensation, and thus leaves little scope for an organic integration of the self's components, particularly between reflection and the other dimensions. A certain number of confusions remain in the *Treatise*, but the only way the reflection that makes freedom possible can be supported in Condillac's mental universe, as Seigel remarks, is by way of the *non-material self* whose existence Condillac affirms in both books. However great the role he assigned to language in fostering human knowledge, reflection in Condillac can turn its critical powers on itself *only* by imagining a thinker, a subject of consciousness undefiled by bodily or relational constitution. In this regard, his position is not far from that of Descartes, whom Condillac had indeed praised in the *Essay* for providing a model that grounded the project of intellectual reform in the history of the mind's fall into confusion.[353]

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[350] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.173-4
[351] Contemporary discussion on the evolution of human language continues to explore the relationship between linguistic signs and its use in the great apes and in humans. Some research with bonobos and chimpanzees suggests, for example, that gestures, rather than vocalisations, may have in effect preceded linguistic signs. (See 'Hands up who wants to talk', in *New Scientist,* 5 May, 2007). But whether gestures or words developed first in human speech is still unresolved, as a more recent article in the same publication, 'The Evolution of Language', by W. Tecumseh Fitch, of 4 December, 2010, reveals.
[352] Jerrold Seigel 2005, p.176
[353] *Ibid*, pp.180-1

Within this scenario of reflection's alternation between subjection and mastery, Condillac gave explicit consideration to the nature of *the self*. His discussion shows the influence of Locke, looking to *consciousness* and *memory* to establish the self's continuity, but unlike Hume, Condillac leaves the questions about morality and action that were important to both Locke and Hume out of account, in order to focus on issues about knowledge and understanding. The strongly materialist *and* spiritualist positions that he seems to hold at once, ridden with difficulties that Condillac himself struggled to overcome, stamp a particular character on his dealings with the self, a response that, like those of his compatriots, may help us understand the historical and political tensions of the period and the conditions of social life in France.[354]

Denis Diderot, the other major *philosophe* during this period, was one of the two editors of the *Encyclopaedia.* Of more moment in the French Enlightenment than Condillac, he was the author of influential works of philosophy and literature, and an important part of the wider Enlightenment project that aimed to separate morality from religion. Where Condillac's central interests were *epistemological*, Diderot's were *moral*. His understanding of morality and its relationship to 'human nature' changed over his lifetime, providing a shifting framework for his thinking on the self. In his earliest writings, Diderot's moral theory was influenced by the Earl of Shaftesbury, whose *Inquiry Concerning Virtue* he translated in 1745, with many of his own comments in the text.[355]

Diderot was initially attracted to Shaftesbury's thinking because it presented 'human nature' as naturally drawn to virtue through a kind of aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of good and the ugliness of evil. Like Hutcheson before, Diderot also believed that gifted with *a moral sense*, people did not require revealed truth in order to be virtuous; the natural order of the universe, in his view, harmonised with an innate human ability to perceive *and* value virtue, drawing people spontaneously to God. Diderot elaborated on these ideas in his *Pensées philosophiques*, although within a few years he had moved from these optimistic and deistic views to a more sceptical position.[356]

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[354] *Ibid,* pp.186-7
[355] *Ibid*, p.187
[356] *Ibid*, p.188

In his *Letter on the Blind* in 1749, we can see Diderot already moving toward the *materialist vitalism* he would expound in *D'Alembert's Dream*. Here, Diderot cast doubt on the order of the universe and on the claim that human beings had a natural ability to perceive the divine order. The *Letter on the Blind* posited a possible continuity between inorganic and organic forms of life, and accounted for the order exhibited by living creatures on the proto-Darwinian ground that only those that spontaneously developed an efficient integration of their parts had been able to survive. The central character in this work, an upright and virtuous English mathematician, is blind, and therefore unable to perceive the aesthetic and moral harmonies in the world. This provided Diderot with an opportunity to ponder on the sources of virtue, and he then began to consider that *moral behaviour* might simply be *natural* to certain individuals, the expression of something *innate* in their make-up.[357]

Diderot's materialism took much of his inspiration from contemporary currents in medicine and biology, which led him to regard life merely as matter, organised in a particular way. In the great continuum of matter, organic and inorganic, possessed or devoid of consciousness, particular individuals came to appear for Diderot only as momentary, insignificant accidents. Led in this view to doubt the separateness and independence of individual life-forms, he writes in *D'Alembert's Dream*: 'In nature, everything is bound up with everything else…What then do you mean when you talk about individuals?...There is only a single great individual, the whole universe.'[358] In this view, human beings are no more uniquely or characteristically individuals than is a bird's wing or a feather, although this way thinking did not deny the consistency and continuity of the self. Diderot did not conclude that individuals were merely illusions, but for him *the self* simply became the specific organisation that made a particular individual possess a definite set of features or qualities. Like Locke and Condillac, Diderot also acknowledged that *experience* provides the *contents* of mental life, but he thought that it was the underlying form of organisation that determined how particular individuals would combine their impressions.

In *D'Alembert's Dream*, Diderot has Dr. Bordeu, in real life a physician and nerve

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[357] *Ibid*

[358] From Diderot's *D'Alembert's Dream*, translation in *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen, New York, 1956 cited by Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.189-90

specialist, and a friend and contributor to the *Encyclopaedia*, describe the human body like an intricate web, at the centre of which sits 'the spider of consciousness', linked to all the parts by the fibres, and through them learning 'everything that goes on in every single part of the dwelling she has woven.' When any thread is stimulated at any point along its extension, the spider will feel the vibration, thus receiving knowledge of what takes place in the various parts of the organism. This novel image is then extended in a political metaphor, as Bordeu's interlocutor remarks that the creature at the centre is either despotically or anarchically governed. Bordeu replies that only the despotic state is a healthy one, for if 'the center gives orders and all the other parts obey, then the creature is master of itself, *compos mentis*, of sound mind.' The essential message for the health and unity of the individual's existence is thus described in terms of this 'domination' by the centre of the web, that part that constitutes the *real self*.[359]

We can see with this image that Diderot too made *memory* the animating property of the self, but with the difference that memory for him was *not* a natural aspect of sense experience as it was for Condillac, but a property of the centre. Memory and all the higher mental functions are not separate faculties of the mind, but mere *consequences* of the relation between the centre of the web and its threads.[360] Diderot's notions of a *unifying centre for the self* sounds close to the modern scientific search for the unifying *locus of consciousness*, and we can easily see a relation between this notion and Diderot's interest in the emergent biological sciences of his time.

Nevertheless, Diderot did not envision the kind of sympathetic and organic relationship between individual development and social interaction posited by British writers like his own friend Hume, and by Adam Smith. In one of his last writings, *Elements of Physiology*, Diderot claims with regard to the ability of 'man' to account for his actions that:

he knows nothing, nothing at all about what he has done, and I see in him a pure machine, simple and

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[359] *Ibid*, pp.190-1
[360] One cannot resist the suggestion of extending Diderot's image of the human body to the web of life in Darwinian thought, or to the similar feeling of unity and integration of humans and non-humans that James Lovelock's Gaia theory inspired in a new generation of environmentally aware readers, who began to see themselves as part of the vast eco-system of the planet.

passive before the different motives that have moved him; far from having been free, he has not even produced a single purposeful act of will; he has thought and felt, but he has not acted more freely than an inert piece of matter, than a wooden automaton who would have done the same things as he did.[361]

Diderot's materialism, as this passage illustrates, dashes any claims about *free will* and *human freedom* as a mere *illusion*, making his notions for self-creation contradict his mechanical conception of human actions. And yet, as Seigel believes that out of Diderot's explicit concern to understand the nature and sources of morality and virtue, there was emerging an independent interest in individual psychology, in whatever it may be that makes each individual be the person he or she is.[362] Diderot valued the sort of natural independence he envisaged partly because it placed individuals outside the hierarchical system of power and social relations that had the monarchy at its centre. Other *philosophes*, however, sought to found individual virtue on a different basis.

In particular, Diderot's position can be contrasted with that of Claude Adrien Helvétius, whose views Diderot rejected on the grounds that they ignored the importance of innate individual differences. Helvétius believed that philosophers should assume the role of legislators, in order to control the conditions under which character was formed and consciousness arose. Believing that *self-love* is the most powerful component of 'human nature', Helvétius thought that it 'transforms itself in each man into vice or virtue according to the tastes and passions that move him…[S]elf love, differently modified, produces equally pride and modesty.'[363]

We can detect in Helvétius the influence of Mandeville and Hume in dealing with *the passions*, but unlike them, Helvétius thought that it was the task of moralists and legislators to create conditions in which people would learn to identify their personal interest with the general interest of society, and thus to devote themselves to *the good*. The *science* of morality, in this definition, only became serious when it was united with politics and legislation.[364] As Kramnick observes, for several of the *philosophes*, namely Voltaire, Diderot and Helvétius, the political ideal was the 'enlightened

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[361] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.199
[362] *Ibid*, p.209
[363] From the account in J.B. Schneewind, 1998, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge, in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.207, note 63, p.677.
[364] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.207

despotism' of a reforming monarch, like Frederick in Prussia or Catherine in Russia, who, while sponsoring religious toleration, was committed to the rational reform of political, legal and economic life.[365]

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, morality was the common springboard for an interest in the self, but in Diderot as in Mandeville, Hume, and Smith, some of its energy ended up powering a more independent fascination for the *contents* of *the psyche*, producing a curiosity about the self that was already transforming traditional ways of understanding morality. The most famous example of this evolution was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to whose ideas the next section turns, but not before examining first the naturalistic context that engendered them and those of his contemporaries.

4.4   The voice of Nature in the late Enlightenment

The strong belief in the benefits of rational understanding was what most of the Enlightenment thinkers saw in Hume's philosophy, and for which he was admired by his French counterparts.[366] From a desire to dispel fanaticism and superstition, a turn towards *a morality found in nature* seemed a logical and reasonable step. The following extract from Holbach illustrates, as an instance of this shift in France, a picture of human beings who are exhorted by the voice of Nature that calls to them to correct their distorted moral insight:

In vain, o superstitious one! do you seek your well-being beyond the limits of the universe where my hand has placed you […] in vain do you trust in these capricious deities whose beneficence sends you into ecstasy; while they fill your sojourn with dread, with wailing, with illusions. Therefore dare to free yourself from the yoke of this religion, my proud rival, that does not recognize my laws. In my dominion reigns liberty…Come back then, child, deserter, come back to nature![367]

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[365] Isaac Kramnick (ed), 1995, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, p.xi
[366] In fact, the *philosophes* dedicated their *Encyclopédie* to Bacon, Locke, and Newton, but were all well acquainted with Hume, as well as with all their predecessors in Britain, whom they held in high regard. (See 'Introduction', in Isaac Kramnick (ed), 1995, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, p.ix)
[367] From Baron d'Holbach's *Le Systéme de la nature*, facsimile reproduction, 2 vols., Geog Olms, Hildesheim, 1999, II, pp.408-9, in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.327; note 13, p.565.

Being freed from the 'yoke' of religion and liberated from superstition and parochial customs, human beings, through an affirmation of the rights of nature, can potentially find happiness in a condition where their interests are harmonised in a properly organised world – or at least, that was what the radical Enlightenment seemed to promise.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries, the force of the ethic of ordinary life and benevolence carried over from theistic to secular forms almost without interruption, as Taylor has noted. The evolution of the moral outlook in the France of the *philosophes* shows a tension between ethical outlooks that drew on ancient philosophy, principally Stoicism and Epicureanism on one hand, and what Taylor calls 'a hyper-Augustinian Jansenism' on the other.[368] In the latter part of Louis XIV's reign, a clerical, triumphant Catholicism brought a stern moralism into France. After the death of this monarch, however, the aristocratic society of the Regency period swung to the opposite extreme of frivolity and moral laxity. It is at such a time that Deism developed its own forms in France, evolving more clandestinely, passionately anti-clerical and anti-Catholic, and often inspired by the work of Spinoza.[369]

In this context emerges the French tradition of the '*libertins*', in which Taylor sees something of the older anti-Catholic Deism remaining. In its origins, the word meant simply a free-thinker, one who was intent on thinking independently of the premises of religious authority.[370] In any case, around the turn of the eighteenth century, the term slides towards its modern meaning, of one who is loose in their morals. All this meant that it was easier in the French context to take seriously the issue of a purely *egoistic materialism* than one predicated on universal benevolence. Illustrating this trend, the Marquis de Sade urges the utter rejection of all social limits as the most consistent liberation from traditional religion and metaphysics. From this perspective, morals, law and virtue are simply irrelevant:

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[368] The Jansenist writers, Taylor explains, such as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, following Pascal, took up Cartesian dualism as a framework for their moral and theological views. But what they could not assimilate in these views was the Cartesian confidence in man's own powers to achieve *the good*, for they believed that the muddle and confusion of embodied thinking that was a consequence of the Fall could not be overcome just by our own intellectual efforts. (Taylor, C., 1989, p.356)

[369] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.334

[370] *Ibid*, p.345. Some of the *libertins*, like Saint-Evremond, were almost exclusively inspired by pre-Christian thought; similar to the kind of Stoic inspiration in Shaftesbury.

Nothing is forbidden us by nature…[Laws], those popular restraints, hold nothing sacred, nothing legitimate in the eyes of philosophy, whose flame dispels all errors and leaves in the mind of the wise man only the aspirations of nature. But nothing is more immoral than nature; she has never imposed limits upon us, nor has she dictated us laws.[371]

Sade's views bring out, as a foil, the usually invisible background of Enlightenment humanism, which Taylor believes is there, 'above the moral horizon' of the Enlightenment thought. Arguing that one needs some *background understanding* about 'what is worthy of strong evaluation', he maintains that just embracing some form of materialism is not sufficient to engender the *full ethic* of *utilitarian benevolence*. Without this background understanding, the moral significance of ordinary happiness and the demand of universal beneficence is absent. Therefore, Taylor concludes that, by itself, 'materialism gives us no more reason to go in this direction than to embrace Sadian egoism.' Just to be a materialist is in Taylor's assessment, 'to have an *undetermined ethical position.*'[372]

And yet, there is in Taylor a hint of a refusal to reach a closure on whether the specific background of Enlightenment humanism that he has sketched is ultimately compatible with materialism. Aware of the complexity that this period presents, he finds in the affirmation of love and benevolence in the midst of French materialism the best hope of meeting its challenge, and in Antoine Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, the last and most idealistic of the Enlightenment *philosophes,* a remarkable instance of such affirmation.[373]

'Le bon Condorcet', as he was universally known, was passionately committed to the ideal of social justice and individual and collective welfare. Inspired by Locke, as were most of the *philosophes*, he believed in the natural rights of men, and, like his contemporary Immanuel Kant, he sought moral imperatives that lead rather than follow the passions. When he was in hiding for eight months, after learning of the

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[371] From Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, I.89, quoted in Naville, D'Holbach, pp.367-68, reproduced in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.336; note 34, p.566
[372] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.336. Emphasis added.
[373] Condorcet pioneered the application of mathematics to the social sciences, an achievement he shared with Laplace, originating the concept that social action might be quantitatively analysed and even predicted. The influence of Condorcet's ideas can thus be found in the work of the early sociologists Auguste Comte and Adolphe Quételet in the 1800s. (E.O. Wilson, 1999, 'The Enlightenment', *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, p.18)

warrant for his arrest ordered by the Committee of Public Safety of the Jacobin-controlled National Convention, Condorcet wrote his masterwork, the famous *Esquisse*, or *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, an intellectual and social history of humanity.[374]

Condorcet's *Esquisse* offers a description of a radiant future in which the principles of justice and benevolence will act for *the common good*, enabling a condition of freedom, dignity, and enlightenment for all:

Shouldn't that consciousness of dignity that belongs to the free man, the education built on a deepened knowledge of our moral constitution, make these principles of a pure and rigorous justice, these habitual movements of an active benevolence, enlightened with a delicate and generous sensibility, the germ of which nature has placed in our hearts, common to almost all men; which principles, to be developed, require only the gentle influence of enlightenment and of freedom?[375]

Taylor calls the *Esquisse* 'the greatest and fullest statement of the philosophy of history of the unbelieving Enlightenment.[376] In this utopian work, Condorcet takes the reader through ten ages of human existence, the tenth being the anticipated future of mankind. There is in this account a progress in knowledge and mores with the firm establishment of the principles of modern epistemology, where gentler ways replace the hardness and barbarism of earlier laws and practices. The serene portrait that Condorcet draws of this future for 'man' is one:

…where living in thought with a humanity re-established in the rights and dignity of its nature, he forgets the one which is corrupted and tormented by greed, fear, or envy; it is there that he exists in reality with those like him, in an Elysium which his reason knows how to create, and which his love for humanity has embellished with the purest enjoyments.[377]

The entire passage takes on additional poignancy, once we realise that when Condorcet wrote this optimistic account in 1793, he had only a few months to live.[378]

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[374] E.O. Wilson, 1999, 'The Enlightenment', *Consilience*, pp.19-21
[375] From Condorcet's *Esquisse*, pp.226-27, quoted in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.330
[376] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.353
[377] From Condorcet's *Esquisse*, pp.238-39, quoted in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.354. Condorcet's utopian belief in progress as the natural goal of humankind is his loftiest achievement and one that would also bring about the intense questioning that followed such a conception.
[378] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.353-54

One of the crucial developments which provided the background for the Encyclopaedists in France, according to Taylor, was the merging of *French Deism* with the English varieties. In a sense, the two intellectual cultures grew together in the eighteenth century, and came close to a fusion that we know as the Enlightenment. Both Montesquieu, with his praise of English politics, and particularly Voltaire, with his *Lettres philosophiques* of 1734, can be seen as two of the main figures responsible for this fusion, and for what can be seen as the importation of English Deism into France and the corresponding transformation of French thought.[379]

There remained important differences of emphasis in the French struggle against religion, most notably in the *libertins* movement, and in the renunciation of any search for the foundations of morality that followed, at least in the sense of a reductive ontology. *Enlightenment naturalism* took up two widely held objections to the standard Deism of the eighteenth century: the first was an 'anti-Panglossian' stance against its rather rosy, optimistic view of the world; the second was an 'anti-levelling' objection, against a too simple view of the *human will*, intent simply on happiness. In the anti-levelling of moral distinctions that this entailed, two are the leading figures of the late Enlightenment: Rousseau and Kant.[380]

Good and evil in Rousseau's 'natural' self

Jean Jacques Rousseau is one of the towering thinkers who espoused the anti-levelling objection that characterised Enlightenment naturalism, inspiring others with the resistance in his philosophy to a one-dimensional picture of the will, and the recovery of the sense that good and evil are always in conflict in the human breast. He started off as a friend of the Encyclopaedists, especially of Diderot, and ended up their enemy. This was partly a matter of different personalities, for Rousseau was not an easy individual to get on with. Their real philosophical disagreement, however, centred on Rousseau's inclination to believe that human evil could not be offset by any increase of knowledge or enlightenment. What Rousseau thought was needed instead was a *transformation of the will*.[381]

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[379] *Ibid*, pp.334-5
[380] *Ibid*, p.355
[381] *Ibid*, pp.355-56

In Rousseau's thinking, the primitive instincts of self-love *(amour de soi)* and sympathy (*pitié*) fuse together in the rational and virtuous human being into a love of *the common good*, which in the political context becomes the '*general will*.' In other words, in Rousseau's conception of the perfectly virtuous individual, self-love is no longer distinct from the love of others. The egoistic tendencies which combat virtue within ourselves are then explained from another motive, which Rousseau calls 'pride', or *amour propre.* This distinction, the opposition between the *self-concern* and the *concern for others*, is in a sense a return to a way of thinking deeply anchored in tradition. In Christian orthodoxy, the source of higher love is grace, but for Rousseau this source has become *the voice of nature*. Nature is fundamentally good, and the estrangement which depraves us is what separates us from it.[382] But there is a new element here, Taylor observed in a later work, because *the good will*, as Rousseau conceives it, is now innate, natural and entirely anthropocentric.[383]

Rousseau's work encompasses his often passionate and sometimes tortured writings on society, politics, education and morals, including a popular epistolary novel, *Julie, or The New Heloise.* By the time that book appeared, Rousseau had already written his two polemical *Discourses*, the first, the *Arts and Sciences*, where he expounded on the malign effects of culture on society and morality, and the second, *The Origins of Inequality*, in which a life outside society is shown as preferable to any form of civilised existence. Both his fame and the controversies surrounding him were heightened by the appearance of *The Social Contract* and of *Emile*, his treatise on education, in 1762. His writing often reflected his own personal behaviour, which Seigel has described as often erratic and driven by suspicion and fear that took on paranoid dimensions in the last decades of his life.[384]

Rousseau straddles the intense rationalism of Enlightenment thought and the emphasis on *feeling and sensibility* that would arise in its wake in the Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[385] His autobiographical *Confessions* is Rousseau's project of self-revelation, where he revels in the *uniqueness* and *autonomy* of individual experience, as the opening passage of this work demonstrates:

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[382] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.357
[383] Charles Taylor, 2007, *A Secular Age*, p.202
[384] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.210
[385] Nick Mansfield, 2000, *Subjectivity*, pp.15-16

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I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself.

Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question that can only be resolved after the reading of my book.[386]

The contrast between Rousseau and the *philosophes* has often been pictured in terms of opposition between Enlightenment reason and an emerging Romantic cult of feeling. The valuing of sentiments was not unusual during this time as we have seen, and Seigel sees the cult of sensibility that was an eighteenth century phenomenon obscured in the aftermath of the Revolution 'by attempts to attribute Jacobin failures and excesses to blind abstraction and cold calculation.'[387] This goes to reinforce the turbulent context in which most of the French writing during the Enlightenment developed, including Rousseau's, and also his particular sensibility.

Rousseau was certainly not the enemy of reason that he has been at times portrayed. The aim of the education exemplified in his *Emile*, for instance, is aimed at one point 'to perfect reason by way of feeling.' The character who gives voice to many of Rousseau's ideas in that book recognises the essential quality of his humanity as he says that he is not just 'a sensitive and passive being, but an active and intelligent one.'[388]

Rousseau's accounts of selfhood bear the stamp of his personality and his history, and are thus deeply ambivalent toward life in society.[389] His negative views about social

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[386] From Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions,* 1781/1953, p.17, in Nick Mansfield, 2000, p.16

[387] Jerrold Seigel quotes here from William M. Reddy's *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions,* Cambridge 2001. (Seigel, J., 2005, p.211)

[388] I continue here to draw on Jerrold Seigel for the historical background to Rousseau's life and work (Seigel, J., 2005, pp.211-247), and also on Charles Taylor, 1989, *Sources of the Self.*

[389] Rousseau's own personal background, as a citizen of Geneva, as he often insisted to describe himself, left a mark in his ideas and philosophy. The Geneva of Rousseau's birth was a mixture of equality and hierarchy, in which its richest citizens were encouraged to model themselves on their French counterparts. The tensions between the French monarchy and the elite became evident in Rousseau's life, when his father was forced to depart from the city to escape humiliation as a result of a dispute. When Rousseau also left Geneva in 1728, he was caught up in the religious politics of the Swiss-French border region. Sent to Turin, he even considered becoming a priest, but instead, he began the musical education that would give him entry into Parisian society as a teacher and composer, undertaking later the process of self-education which would be the groundwork for his literary career. When he visited Geneva in 1754, Rousseau reconverted to Protestantism, and recovered his rights of citizenship, but he remained suspect to many people in the city and he never returned there to live.

existence go alongside his nostalgia for the elemental strength and innocence of the so-called state of nature. Rousseau was at the same time aware of *the power of social relations* to give coherence to an otherwise fluid and unstable core of personal being, but he saw these as imposing an unbearable and disfiguring dependency, which always left him with a longing for personal wholeness.

The central issue of Rousseau's intellectual life - the clash between the innocent, morally pure individual in isolation from society and the inhuman, alienating, and corrupting influence of society - is clearly conveyed in the following passage of his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, written between 1776 and 1778, during the last two years of his emotionally turbulent life:

Now I am alone in the world, with no brother, neighbor or friend, nor any company left me but my own…I would have loved my fellow-men in spite of themselves. It was only by ceasing to be human that they could forfeit my affection…But I, detached as I am from them and from the whole world, what am I? This must now be the object of my inquiry.[390]

Another passage, written after a walk in the forest at Saint-Germain, where he contemplates what he believes is the debased nature of humankind, illustrates Rousseau's fundamental insight, based on solitude and contemplation. It is only by reawakening the individuality he sees as both humanity's birthright and its highest goal, that he is able to reach the state of exaltation that enables his soul to 'soar towards the Divinity':

I dared to strip man's [sic] nature naked, to follow the progress of time, and trace the things which have distorted it; and by comparing man as he had made himself with man as he is by nature I showed him in his pretended perfection the true source of his misery. Exalted by these sublime meditations, my soul soared towards the Divinity; and from that height I looked down on my fellow men pursuing the blind path of their prejudices, of their errors, of their misfortunes and their crimes.[391]

Rousseau's opening line of Book I of *Emile* begins: '*Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses; tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme.*'[392] The original

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[390] From Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, quoted in Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 2006*,* p.178
[391] From Rousseau's *Confessions,* 1781/1953, p.362, quoted in Nick Mansfield, 2000, p.17
[392] 'All is good that comes from the Author of all things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.' From *Emile*, p.353; English translation by Barbara Foxley, London: Dent, 1911, cited in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.357; note 7.,

impulse of nature is right, but the effect of our dependence on others separates us from this *inner impulse*. Human beings can only recover the sanctity of their *true nature* and liberate their own self by recovering their self-sufficiency and autonomy; only then will they enjoy the full promise of their natural potential.

'Noble savages' or social selves? Recovering the self in the voice of nature

The state of nature that Rousseau imagined was the one that the first humans inhabited, dispersed and isolated from one another, but independent, each one 'satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook.' Such creatures possess no sense of self, however, in the terms in which Rousseau had his characters define it in *Emile.* They are creatures of 'pure sensation', living in an unchanging world:

Each one's soul, which nothing disturbs, is wholly wrapped up in the feeling of its present existence, without any idea of the future, however near at hand; while his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of day.[393]

Rousseau sees these 'savages', as he calls them, as self-reliant, capable of providing for their needs, compared to the individuals living in society. His experience told him that as people begin to live together in communities and acquire a sense for the particularity and persistence of their own personal identity, they also become subject to the dependence on others, dependence that Rousseau saw as the root of all society's evils.

The two kinds of forces pulling individuals in different directions are therefore only reconciled in Rousseau's view if something like a redefinition of the social contract were possible, where people would be able to experience inside society the wholeness they had possessed before they entered it - thus combining the advantages of their *'natural'* self with their *'social'* self. Rousseau's political theory presents a vision of reconciliation between these two forms of self-existence; one can even say between

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p.569 (translation cited differs from mine).
[393] From Rousseau's 'Second Discourse', *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, in *The Social Contract and Discourses,* trans. G.D.H. Cole, revised by J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall, London and Melbourne, 1986, cited in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.217

the egocentric and sociocentric tendencies that Kahn recognises as characteristic of this period. This vision however, is not a hopeful one, since Rousseau makes it clear that it can never be realised. We thus end up with a condition that can only lead the self back into a feeling of despair and *unfulfilled longing*.

The popular image of Rousseau as the admirer of the 'noble savage' is nevertheless far from the views that he propounded. Rousseau did not advocate going back to a pre-cultural or pre-societal stage; the recovery of contact with nature was for him an escape from calculating over-dependence, from the force of opinion and the ambitions it engendered, through what can be seen as a kind of alignment, or 'fusion of reason and nature, or of culture and society on one hand, and the true élan of nature on the other.'[394] In order for us to recover the voice of the repressed self, and recover our contact with nature, we need a re-engagement with what is most intimate and essential in ourselves, rendered inaudible by the clamour of the world. And this for Rousseau is '*conscience*':

Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal voice from heaven; sure guide for a creature ignorant and finite indeed, yet intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and evil, making man like to God! In thee consists the excellence of man's nature and the morality of his actions; apart from thee, I find nothing in myself to raise me above the beasts – nothing but the sad privilege of wandering from one error to another, by the help of an unbridled understanding and a reason which knows no principle.[395]

Conscience is the voice of nature as it emerges in a being that has entered society and is endowed with language and hence reason. The *general will* represents the demands of nature, free from all distortion due to other-dependence or opinion. The *austere freedom* that Rousseau espouses in *The Social Contract* is close to that of the ancient Stoics, and this austerity is also crucial to the political formula of self-obedience through a commonly established law. Here Rousseau takes up one of the well-known themes of the civic humanist tradition, as he warns of the corrupting effects of wealth and ease on civic virtue.[396]

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[394] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.359
[395] From 'Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard', *Emile*, Editions Garnier, 1964, pp.354-55; English translation by Barbara Foxley, in Charles Taylor 2007, p.204; note 55, p.799
[396] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.360

Rousseau was not the only thinker of his time to see a dichotomy between self-autonomy and the self that society's norms configured. Others would follow in his steps, and propose different ways of preserving a sense of freedom for the self that could accommodate morality as well as religion. In such an endeavour, no one holds a place of prominence like the one Western philosophy has traditionally accorded to Kant.

4.5 The free and rational moral agent in Kant

The Kantian 'good will'

Immanuel Kant was undoubtedly the most influential philosopher of the modern era. A champion of reason and humanity, Kant saw the Enlightenment as a defining moment in human development, the casting off of what he called humanity's 'self-caused immaturity.' He described the Enlightenment in terms of courage and daring, proposing its motto, *sapere aude*, 'dare to know', after the Roman poet Horace. Hailed as the founding spirit of the German Romantic movement which was to change the consciousness of Europe, he was also the reputed father of nineteenth-century Idealism.

Kant lived and taught at Königsberg, a part of the Prussian state at the time. His early works were followed by a period of silence and then by the first of the three great *Critiques* - the *Critique of Pure Reason* published in1781, and followed by a second edition in 1787. This *Critique* is a starting point in Kant's systematic examination of the entire field of epistemology and metaphysics. The other two *Critiques* are the *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788, concerned with ethics, and the 1790 *Critique of Judgement*, concerned largely with aesthetics. The *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (1783) and *The Foundation of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785) are two of the most important among Kant's other works. The *Foundation*, also known as *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, is the work that sets out Kant's lifelong ethical stance and his, for many, austere moral views.[397]

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[397] Roger Scruton, 2005, pp.139-40

As a typical representative of the Enlightenment, Kant believed in the power of courageous reasoning and in the effectiveness of the reform of institutions, which led him to reformulate what he perceived were common problems in his time. His *Critique of Pure Reason* is a synthesis where Newtonian science and the empiricism of Helvétius and Hume combine, extending the discussion introduced in the *Fundamental Principles*. Kant's theory of knowledge, as presented in this *Critique*, has important implications for his theory of morals, as MacIntyre has noted. Empiricism argued that there are no rational grounds for belief in anything beyond what our senses have already encountered; while Newtonian physics offered laws applicable to all events in space and time. The question was then for Kant how to reconcile them.[398]

Kant believed that we have no way of inferring causal relationships beyond and outside experience, and this means that we cannot validly infer from the causal order of nature to a God who is its author. Nature is entirely impersonal and non-moral; it may be viewed *as if* it were the product of a great benevolent designer, but we cannot affirm that it *is* such. We therefore have to look for the realm of morals *outside* the realm of nature. Morals must also be independent of what goes on in the world, for the world too is non-moral. Kant thus assumed *a priori* that all our experience will turn out to be *law governed*, following Newtonian causality, not because of the character of the external world, but because of the *character of the concepts* through which we grasp that world. *Experience,* according to Kant, is not the passive reception of impressions; it is the *active* grasping and *comprehension of perceptions*, but without the concepts and categories by means of which we order and understand them, experience would be formless and meaningless.[399]

The impulse underlying the *Fundamental Principles* is, in Kant's words, 'nothing more than the investigation and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*',[400] a 'weighty question' that he considers of utmost urgency. The method that he proposes to follow for this task involves a 'natural dialectic', as Kant calls it:

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[398] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1967/1998, p.183
[399] *Ibid*, pp.183-84
[400] Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals,*, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.289-90

proceeding analytically from common knowledge to the determination of its ultimate principle, and again descending synthetically from the examination of this principle and its sources to the common knowledge in which we find it employed.[401]

Like many of his contemporaries in Germany, Kant was especially influenced first by Hutcheson and by Hume, but most powerfully by Rousseau. When he read Rousseau's remarks on the dignity of ordinary 'human nature', Kant immediately thought that it is the *moral consciousness* of this ordinary 'human nature' that could enable what character our moral concepts and precepts must have to make morality possible. Kant takes the existence of an ordinary moral consciousness for granted, in the same way in which he took Newton's laws for granted, but intrigued by his awareness of the fact that moral schemes may differ between cultures and at different historical times, he approaches the question from an initial assertion that nothing is *unconditionally* good except *good will*.[402]

Since reason is imparted to us as 'a practical faculty', the faculty that has influence on our will, Kant thought, reason's 'true destination' must be that of producing 'a *will*, not merely good as a *means* to something else, but *good in itself*.' It is in the establishment of *a good will* 'as its highest practical destination' that reason attains its purpose. The *goodness* of the will is a notion that Kant believes exists already 'in the sound natural understanding', requiring rather to be cleared up than to be taught. And for this purpose, he finally invokes the complementary notion of *duty*, as a requirement for the exercise of the good will. Wanting to discover the motives or intentions that make the good will that he believes is *innate* in every person good, Kant argues that the good will is conditioned by the agent's sense of acting *as duty requires*, but not *because duty requires*, and it is in this way only that the agent's conduct can acquire true moral worth.[403]

Kant's position, although close to that of Rousseau, involves a different psychological approach. The primacy that Rousseau accorded to the inner voice suggested that society must be changed to make it worthy of the individual, and not the other way

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[401] *Ibid,* First Section, 'Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical', p.296
[402] Alasdair MacIntyre 1967/1998, p.184
[403] Immanuel Kant, First Section, 'Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical', *Fundamental Principle*s, in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, pp.291-93

around. At the same time, belief in an underlying natural or providential harmony encouraged all to regard such a restoration of former concord in society as theoretically possible. Kant too believed that the whole purpose of religion was moral action and that man was a wholly *free moral agent*. For Kant, as for Rousseau, Christianity has a primarily symbolic value; natural religion conveys to each 'man' all he needs to know in order to perform his moral duty. He also knew that much that is most characteristically human cannot be understood in naturalistic terms, but since everything that happens in the world is subject to causal explanation, he found it difficult to see how this could leave room for the freedom we assume to possess, to make choices about how to act.[404]

Kant thought that it was possible that there existed a separate world of '*noumena*', or 'things in themselves', inaccessible to science, where moral freedom could survive. We thus find the following claim at the beginning of *The Critique of Pure Reason*: 'I have found it necessary to *deny knowledge* in order to make room for *faith.*'[405] This neat separation between the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal* world allowed Kant to concentrate on the latter without any disturbance to his religious faith. With this strategy, he places human thought and action inside a world of material causality, leaving the sense that human actions can be free and meaningful, and where they are protected from scientific determinism.[406]

For moral reason to fulfil its promise requires that creation, which is to say the world itself in Kant's understanding, 'possess in terms of its own existence a final goal', or purpose, which 'we cannot conceive otherwise than as harmonizing necessarily with our moral faculty.'[407] Thus only if the world can be assumed to be organised toward such an intelligible end, instituted by a rational being, can we expect reason and reflection to have power over our material urges, needs and desires.

With this *teleological view*, Kant reaffirms the concept of the rational agent, but one

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[404] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.296
[405] Julian Young, 2003, p.27
[406] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.295-331
[407] From Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment,* trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford, 1952, Part II, and Veronique Zanetti, 'Teleology and the Freedom of the Self', in *The Modern Subject: Conception of the Self in Classical German Philosophy,* ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, Albany, 1995, cited in Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.296

whose primary task is to bring selfish personal desires and behaviours into line with reason-based ideals of *social duty*. And yet, having established the primacy of duty to guide one's actions, he thought that even though 'most of our actions are correct', if we look closer, 'a cool observer, one that does not mistake the wish for good, however lively, for its reality, may sometimes doubt whether true virtue is actually found anywhere in the world.'[408]

Freedom and morality in the Kantian self

If this is the case, the only thing that can 'secure us from falling away altogether from our ideas of duty', or maintain a respect for its law, Kant asserts, is to think of this duty as involved in the idea 'of a reason determining the will by *a priori* principles.' What is needed is to follow and describe the practical faculty of reason, 'from the general rules of its determination to the point where the notion of duty springs from it.' This is what Kant believes is involved in treating man's morality' as pure philosophy, that is, 'as metaphysic, complete in itself.'[409]

The point of arrival in this metaphysic is to conceive *an objective principle*, which, insofar as it may be *obligatory for a will*, is called a command, and Kant thus asserts that 'the formula of the command is called an imperative.' But for this command to represent an action 'as necessary of itself without reference to another end, that is, objectively necessary', such an imperative must be '*categorical*.' Only conceived as *good in itself* and 'as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason', will this constitute an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. Only then will this imperative 'may be called that of morality.'[410]

Taking his conclusion further, Kant describes the conditions that differentiate the *categorical* imperative he has just proposed as *obligatory* for the will from what he calls a *hypothetical* imperative:

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[408] From Immanuel Kant's *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals,* Second Section, 'Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysic of Morals', trans. By Thomas K. Abbott (1873), in Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, 2002, p.297
[409] *Ibid*, pp.297-99
[410] *Ibid*, pp.299-300

When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary.[411]

Thus Kant arrives at the famous dictum that defines the categorical imperative: '*Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law*.' Furthermore, since Kant believes that the universality of the law according to which its effects are produced underlies 'what is properly called *nature*', the existence of things determined by general laws, the imperative of duty in this maxim is consequently expressed thus: '*Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature.*'[412]

It is out of *respect for the human will* that Kant is then compelled to ask whether it is 'a necessary law *for all rational beings* that they should always judge of their actions by maxims of which they can themselves will that they should serve as universal laws?'[413] If the answer is in the affirmative, as Kant clearly believes it is, the categorical imperative is then invoked as 'a supreme practical principle' drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily *an end for everyone* because it is *an end in itself*. This is to say, because rational beings are uniquely conceived *as persons*, since as Kant explains 'their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is, as something which must not be used merely as means, and so far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect)'[414], rational beings thus conceived must be considered free.

The foundation of this principle, that '*rational nature exists as an end in itself*', consequently means that every person conceives his or her own existence as being so. This can be said to be a *subjective principle* of human action, as Kant defines it. However, because every other rational being regards his or her existence similarly, the principle is also said to be at the same time 'an *objective principle*', from which 'as a

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[411] *Ibid,* p.303
[412] *Ibid*
[413] *Ibid,* p.305
[414] *Ibid,* p.306

supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced.' This leads Kant to advance this by now famous practical imperative, defining its consequence as follows: '*So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.*'[415]

In this principle lies Kant's notion of *freedom* arising from *the categorical imperative*. This is a notion that has been subjected to extensive critique, as it is too narrow and prescriptive, if we follow its implications logically as the only guide for our moral conduct. Nevertheless, it also deserves further attention, in order to grasp all its complexity. With a single formulation, Kant establishes subjectivity and objectivity as co-extensive. The articulation of Kant's ethical imperative, as described earlier in the *Fundamental Principles,* requires that in order to be a virtuous, moral being, we must do our duty and ignore our inclinations, and that, aided by the use of our reason, we discover what our duty is - obeying a set of rules or categorical imperatives. This formulation leads one to will never to act otherwise than according to the *maxims* that the *rational will* establishes for us *as principles*.

The compulsory nature of this *universalising principle* has been attacked as the potential source of a morality that may lead to immoral choices at times, as has been suggested by many of Kant's readers since. The law that the free will recognises as a law unto itself is that every action should be an expression of the moral law itself - but the circularity of this argument points to its obvious weakness, as we can see. It seems that we would need to look elsewhere in Kant's work to bring in the much needed clarity to his argument for freedom and morality. For this, we must turn to his *Critiques*.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, completed after the *Fundamental Principles*, Kant makes a much more radical move than any in his first *Critique*. He had previously divided cognitive powers into pure or conceptual reason, practical reason and judgement.[416] The notion of *freedom* in the second *Critique* becomes '*transcendental*' because the process of critical reflection of the moral law, the

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[415] *Ibid*
[416] Jürgen Habermas has seen this as 'a distinction that powered the enlightenment', and formed a relevant basis to his own discussion of rationality in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, published in 1971.

categorical imperative, proves that the conditions for its comprehension necessarily imply that such a being is free *to direct* its own will. Kant is exceptionally lucid on this point in the following passage from the Preface to this *Critique:*

Inasmuch as the reality of the concept of freedom is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, it is the *keystone* of the whole system of pure reason, even the speculative, and all other concepts (those of God and immortality) which, as being mere ideas, remain in it unsupported, now attach themselves to this concept, and by it obtain consistence and objective reality; that is to say their *possibility* is *proved* by the fact that freedom actually exists, for this idea is revealed by the moral law.[417]

Kant's assertion that the concept of freedom is the 'keystone of the whole system' certainly determines the primacy of *practical reason*, but it also determines the fact that *pure reason* can also be practical. Most importantly, it determines that freedom, as a quality of the will, is a necessary attribute of all rational beings.[418] Another way to understand this, according to Seigel, is that the objective world of material causes and relations is invested with *subjectivity*, with the directedness and coherence of a *rational consciousness*.[419]

Kant's position nevertheless remains somewhat unclear, as Gregory Heath, among other critics, has observed. The circularity of argument in these earlier deductions also preoccupied Kant himself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* he had said:

In other words, only insofar as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them all *mine.* For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself. [420]

If the unity of apperception gives rise to the unity of consciousness, then where is the 'I' that unites this consciousness, we might well ask. Kant shows awareness of this difficulty when he discusses how the 'I' *that thinks* can be distinct from the 'I' *that intuits* itself. Kant's attempts to elucidate his thinking on this score do not seem to be entirely successful. In his philosophy, there is no passage from the privilege of self-knowledge to the essence of what is known. The privilege of the first person

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[417] From Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works,* trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, Longman, London, 1909, in Gregory Heath, 2000, *The Self and Communicative Theory*, p.52
[418] Gregory Heath, 2000, p.46
[419] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.298
[420] From Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, in Gregory Heath, 2000, p.39

presupposes the existence of the self *as object*; and it is clearly not for self-knowledge to determine what it knows.

The essence of the self remains hidden, even though its accidents are immediately 'given' to consciousness. Kant nevertheless is able to connect this view with a theory of practical knowledge, and of the moral being of the self that is to define and validate a concept of objectivity capable at the same time of generating a system of morality, aspects of which are still relevant today.

Other critics still have tried to explain how this Kantian self, which allows us to have a relationship with the world, is much more fundamental than what we call a personality, or an identity, since it seems to operate before we discover all the things that make our 'I' separate from everyone else's. Nick Mansfield for one believes that this Kantian self, even though not yet the fully formed individual, can be thought as the bedrock on which individuality is built. He thus perceives in it:

the sense that experience of the world is focused on a thing that is aware, that is processing the information it receives, that is turning mutations in the field of light into meaningful representations that can lead to judgment and action. Kant's understanding of that 'aware' entity is more intense than merely the word 'conscious' would allow.[421]

4.6   Autonomy and Expressivism in Kant and beyond

In the late eighteenth century, new philosophical currents brought in a renewed contact with the deep sources of nature, conferring a heightened and more vibrant quality to human life. *Expressivism* is one such current, emphasising the realisation of the self in harmony with the world, and finding in this impulse the freedom and fulfilment of its human potential. Starting with Rousseau as its point of departure, it can be said to have had its first important articulation in the work of Herder. It is then taken up not only by Romantic writers, but by Goethe, and in another way, by Hegel, becoming, Taylor claims, 'one of the constituent streams of modern culture.'[422]

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[421] Nick Mansfield, 2000, p.19
[422] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.368

The universal idea of selfhood in Kant is organised around the notion of autonomy and individual rationality. In Leibniz, the self is not the bearer of a universal reason, and it does not necessarily transcend material existence; it simply follows the innate principle of its own nature. In this sense, it can be conceived as 'expressivist', unfolding or articulating an already present intention or direction.[423]

Both forms of selfhood, *the autonomous* and *the expressivist*, depend on what Seigel describes as the isomorphism between individuals and the world that German thinkers repeatedly posited in the eighteenth century, and beyond. Kant's idea of autonomy owed much to Rousseau, but Rousseau developed it only in the context of politics, never looking to reason as a power able to integrate the personality and ground individual moral autonomy in the way that Kant did. Kant eventually relied on a *purposive principle* in nature like the one Leibniz had posited, since without it, reason was helpless to determine the will in a material world. *Expressivist selfhood*, according to Seigel, 'equally required this kind of homology, since otherwise the unfolding of any individual's innate principle would be impeded or distorted by its entry into an inhospitable world outside.'[424]

The Leibnizian form of selfhood was given new life in Kant's own time by Herder, Kant's student, and by others who drew on Herder's organic and harmonious universe. Herder's expressivism would be combined with versions of Kantian autonomy by his followers, notably Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.[425] Both of these forms of selfhood, internally related, could take radical and moderate forms. Both were capable of supporting radical notions of self-realisation, since they posited a world in harmony with the self, but each was also capable of assigning limits to the self. In the Kantian autonomy, this was demonstrated in its recognition that humans are material creatures as well as rational ones, and in expressivism, through the acknowledgement that every self had to inhabit a world that others also inhabited. Seigel sees Kant himself exemplifying the moderation with which the idea of autonomy could be developed, in a similar manner to that exhibited in the expressivist

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[423] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, p.299, note 4. Although Charles Taylor emphasises the distinction between autonomous and expressivist forms of selfhood, Jerrold Seigel notes that Taylor does not seem to regard Leibniz as an important source of expressivist thinking.

[424] *Ibid*

[425] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.299-309. Seigel gives a full account of the political context of the period and its effect on German thinkers and those who followed in their path, in this section.

formulations of Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt.

Language, subjectivity and diversity

Like Taylor and Seigel, Kahn also believes that the expressivist critique of Enlightenment anthropology resulted in 'an intuitionist critique of reason, an extreme romantic individualism, a particular romantic aesthetics, and pantheistic nature worship.' Expressivism, according to Kahn, provided the foundation of two important ideas: first, '*the meaning of human cultural life*'; and second, '*the diversity of human groups.*' These two ideas are particularly bound with the new understanding of the role of language, based on a conception that went beyond its instrumental view as a mere referential sign operating in an objectified world. As an expression of human capacity or potential; the purpose of language is not pre-given, but rather 'created by human subjectivity.'[426]

This *new conceptualisation of language* was of enormous significance to the perception of the self and of the way social groups are constituted. By recognising the interior relationship that language bears to human thought and the link to our *individual subjectivity* and its *expression in social groupings*, the full dynamic and complex nature of language began to be examined more closely. Not only did the powerful idea that all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language, but the novel idea that language has an important role in how we conceive our worlds, already contained in Herder's notion of *Volkgeist*, began to take centre stage in philosophical discussion.[427]

The idea that the structure of the language we speak determines the manner in which we apprehend our environment and social reality would be taken up and passionately conveyed by pioneer thinkers like Benjamin Lee Whorf early in the 1940s.[428] Whorf, like Sapir and Wittgenstein, introduced the modern concept of *linguistic relativity* and

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[426] Joel S. Kahn, 1995, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture*, Sage Publications Ltd., London, p.28
[427] *Ibid,* pp.29-30
[428] According to Whorf 'every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.' (Whorf, B.L., 'Language, Mind, and Reality', in *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writing of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, John B. Carroll, ed., 1988, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., p.252)

opened up new directions in socio and psycholinguistics, and language theory in general, thus changing forever the illusion that language was a universal, uncontaminated essence of reason, a notion inherited from our Greek ancestors.[429]

From 'communities' to 'nation states'

The notion of *cultural difference* was a direct development of the instrumental rationalism of the eighteenth century; but however much the thinkers of the latter part of the century and early nineteenth century seemed to endorse this rationalist ideal, the accompanying notion that claimed that the Enlightenment individual was free and autonomous was nevertheless thrown into doubt. Some of these thinkers, such as Marx, began to wonder whether this freedom did not mean in fact alienating human beings from their true 'species being' or nature, by an imperative to compete against each other in the social arena. Hegel, on the other hand, saw the path to emancipation through an institution that would stand outside civil society; arguing that only in this manner could the selfishness imposed on 'man' by this kind of society be curbed and true reason attain its fullest expression. That institution for Hegel was the state.[430]

Enlightenment and expressivist strands still persist in modern culture, and they can also combine with disastrous results. Kahn reminds us how the Romantic appeal to expressive nationalism was carried to extremes during Nazi Germany, culminating in the distorted and ruthless application of instrumental reason. On the positive side, nationalism promotes certain narratives, required by a nation to construct a sense of history, and to document its achievements. These narratives, these stories of 'imagined communities', as Benedict Anderson[431] has called them, have a profound influence on the manner in which we constitute ourselves and in which we view our present.

Communities were first conceived in opposition to those isolated clusters of self-

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[429] Following Whorf, modern thinkers took this radical idea of the role of language in human affairs and the constitution of the self even further, questioning the very ability of language to always and unequivocally reflect what we think. In so doing, the view of linguistic transparency was devastatingly shattered by the poststructuralist thinking that followed.

[430] Joel S. Kahn, 1995, pp.30-31

[431] Benedict Anderson, 1983, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London

interested individuals that were at the centre of the Enlightenment's rational instrumental philosophy. From the idea of communities and their homogeneity, as social matrices that serve 'at least to contain and at most to negate human egoism', it is but a natural step to think of other communities and their difference. Such a notion would soon be informed, in both positive and negative ways, by the spread of Western imperialism and by counter-imperialist discourses alike.[432]

The effect of expressivism on Western notions of alterity meant that a language for dealing with *difference*, with 'otherness', had to emerge, even as the language of rule, domination and subordination came increasingly into use. As Kahn notes, the very notion of empire, which cultural critics like the late Edward Said have so incisively examined, contains language that tries to grapple with concepts of profound cultural difference. On one hand, there is the idea of subjugation of peoples inhabiting distant and unknown territories, while at the same time there is an 'almost metaphysical obligation' which Said finds in the imperial nineteenth century impulse in Britain and the Western world, to rule 'subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples.' Thus, Kahn tells us, 'the discourses of empire/counter-empire in the nineteenth century spoke the same language of culture, difference and destiny, just as they have in the twentieth.'[433] One could perhaps add that the force of such discourses is still with us now, even as different kinds of attempts are made to attenuate their imperialist bias.[434]

The preoccupation with *cultural difference* that is a main feature of nineteenth century social theory, following Herder, was to manifest itself in a preoccupation with the *symbolic expression* of specific groups, who were thought of as being held together by a common language and a perceived common culture. But while the claims to nationhood had been advanced to remedy the supposed shortcomings of eighteenth century universalism, Kahn points to the curious fact that these claims themselves were made in universalistic terms, as they argued for the rights of *all* peoples to their own unique national traditions.[435]

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[432] Joel S. Kahn, 1995, pp. 33-35
[433] *Ibid,* pp.34-35
[434] A new critique of these opposing forces is probably more visible in recent literary strands coming from the Indian subcontinent these days, and to a certain extent in southeast Asia too, in what we can call a different response to subalternity, or rather alterity, in contemporary fiction and also in economic theory.
[435] Joel S. Kahn, 1995, pp.36-37

Nevertheless, the ways in which modern Europeans came to conceive of nations has been perhaps the dominant influence on the way they came to conceive of a single world made up of a diversity or mosaic of cultures, as Kahn observes.

The promise and 'problem' of a universally compelling aspiration

The notion of the *autonomous modern subject* is also the focus of Robert Pippin's discussion of 'the problem' of the Enlightenment, following a particular understanding of the dissatisfaction of European high culture with modernity and its modernist manifestation.[436] Pippin too sees in the German Idealist tradition a desire to address the claims for reason in the Kantian subject while preserving the appeal of his commitment to freedom and self-determination. It is at this point that the search for a realisation of human freedom in modernity begins.[437]

Kahn finds that expressivism resonates particularly at times of perceived crises. He sees in Marx's account of the alienating characteristics of modern civil society only the beginning of this current in modern thought, a trend enduring in the writings of postcolonial and multicultural theorists, as well as of some notable contemporary anthropologists.[438] But it is in the so-called Frankfurt school[439] springing as much from the concerns of Weber as the vision of Marx, that according to Kahn we find the genesis of a critical theory of modernity in the twentieth century.

Calvin Schrag points to the definition of modernity in Weber and Habermas, where there is a splitting apart of the domains of *science, morality and art*. This 'unhappy' differentiation, he also finds in Kant's *Critiques*, which mark off the boundaries of

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[436] Robert B. Pippin, 1999, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, Second Edition, Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts and Oxford, p.xv.

[437] *Ibid*, pp.56-60 and 193, note 13. Pippin sees in the modern notion of the possibility of independence and autonomy, or a genuine self-rule, an explanation for the many tensions and paradoxes that keep reappearing in social and aesthetic contexts, as Taylor too has noted. For this reason, Pippin views Nietzsche and Heidegger using art as 'a foil for the modern, even the entire, philosophical tradition.'

[438] Some of these thinkers, Kahn points out, combine the concerns of the Young Hegelians and of Weber, characteristic of all Frankfurt School exponents, Adorno's critique of mass culture and Habermas' critique of instrumental rationality. Similar attacks on 'economism' have been made by Chayanov, Polanyi and Sahlins, and in the writings of Clifford Geertz, as well as those of Marcel Mauss, among others. (Kahn, Joel S., 1995, pp.32-3)

[439] The writings of the Frankfurt school, of which Adorno and Horkheimer are representative, critique the hopes that the presumed illumination of Enlightenment thought had brought with it, and which, following the genocidal policies of Nazism, were so dramatically and obviously negated. (See Adorno, Theodor W., and Horkheimer, Max, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming. English translation first published by Herder & Herder, New York, 1972, Verso third edition, London, 1992)

these spheres in such a manner as to make unification among them highly problematic, if not impossible.[440] Hegel's project of a dialectical mediation of opposites also fell short of the unification he envisioned. Similarly, Schrag sees Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, and Marx reacting to the unity of the rational and the real and the identity of essence and existence projected by Hegel, which they found to be an abstract notion, 'never making its way into the concrete concerns that pervade sensory-biological, ethico-religious, and socioeconomic spheres of human life.'[441]

Seigel similarly finds German Idealism leading to an uncovering of the *finitude of human self-relations*, and not at all to the implication that human existence transcends its contexts and conditions. Kant's determination to open up pure reflective freedom and take it beyond the confines of material existence inspired some of his followers to see his thinking as a call to transcend the limits that he himself was willing to impose on it. In the expressivist case, the potential to develop radical claims about freedom and self-fulfilment would find actualisation in a collective turn to the notion that pictured humanity as realising its essential being through historical projection, as Feuerbach, Marx, and in a different way, Heidegger did.[442]

The voice of nature within us manifested aesthetically

The link between expressivism and the aesthetic realm is one that particularly concerns Taylor. He too, like Kahn and Seigel, finds in the Romantic movement and its rejection against the classical stress on rationalism, an affirmation of the *rights of the individual*, of the *imagination*, and of *feeling*. The notion of an *inner source* or impulse, seen perhaps more commonly in French writers like Lamartine or Musset, is also the impulse in us *of nature*, as the larger order to which we belong. This is the case with some English writers, like Blake, and in a different way, also with Wordsworth.[443] Coleridge, who was very influenced by German thoughts, expresses a similar idea: 'Everything has a life of its own…and we are all *One Life*.'[444]

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[440] Calvin O. Schrag, 1997, 'Introduction', *The Self after Postmodernity*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p.6
[441] *Ibid*, p.7
[442] Jerrold Seigel, 2005, pp.299-300
[443] Charles Taylor, 1989, p.368
[444] Taylor cites this quote from M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1953, in Note 3, *Sources,* 1989, p.571. In the same note, Taylor also refers to a similar and delicate image in Shelley, that

This inner impulse also carries with it a feeling of *solidarity with our fellow beings* - an idea which is further elaborated in Germany too. In Herder in particular, nature is a great current of sympathy running through all things: 'See the whole of nature, behold the great analogy of creation. Everything feels itself and its like, life reverberates to life.'[445] This view, enmeshed with our sense of morality, is found in a slide from standard Deism, or even theism and Christian orthodoxy, to a secularised variant, through a series of intermediate stages, as Taylor has repeatedly observed. There is thus see a kind of *pantheism* in the Romantic generation, with the early Schelling, for instance; and in another form with Hegel later.[446]

There is in expressivism a return to *biological* models of growth against the *mechanistic* ones of association in the account of human life and development; models which Herder articulated so effectively in this period. With the idea of *nature within*, the Aristotelian concepts, according to Taylor, are thus interwoven with the modern notion of expression 'as an articulation which both manifests and defines.'[447] As one of the cornerstones of modern culture, expressivism, centring as it did on the constructive powers of language in the late eighteenth century, also identified and exalted 'a new poietic power, that of the creative imagination.'[448]

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The Enlightenment, as Peter Gay pointed out, has always had its simplistic admirers and its vehement detractors. It has been blamed for aspects of modernism that exemplify 'superficial rationalism, foolish optimism, and irresponsible Utopianism,'[449] for the excesses of the French Revolution and the failed experiments of the twentieth century's various upheavals. Nevertheless, as Gay and before him Ernst Cassirer believed, and as A.C. Grayling has more recently observed, the Enlightenment, 'as a cultural climate, as a complex movement of thought, and as a set of aspirations for the improvement of mankind's lot, remains eminently worth

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of the Aeolian lyre which is made to sound by the wind.

[445] From Johann Gottlob Herder, *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele*, in Herder's *Samtliche Werke,* ed. Bernard Suphan, cited in Charles Taylor, 1989, p.369

[446] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.369-70

[447] *Ibid*, pp.370-75

[448] *Ibid*, p.198

[449] From Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols., Knopf, New York, 1966, 1969, quoted in Grayling, A.C., 2004, p.131

understanding – and not least because it represents a key moment in the quest for the good life.'[450]

The deeply held convictions displayed by most of the thinkers in this period, in their search for moral foundations and enlightened reason, self-realisation and universal justice, were caught in a swirl of self-doubting, bold imagination and daring assertion, where the most utopian aspirations, such as Condorcet's, mixed with utilitarian views to harmonise society, and where sympathy and moral sentiments underpinned behaviour, and belief became subjected to the rule of law. Our *poietic* narrative has followed many of these undercurrents that opposed, and more often combined a new subjectivism with objective, materialist conceptions of the world, in a blend where the diverse conceptions of the self, from theism to secularism, were once more reconfigured. In these twists and turns, there always remained, somewhere in the banks of human consciousness, an awareness of a higher order, an undefined longing for a kind of transcendence and self-expression that had its roots in the awe and beauty that the natural world inspired.

What undoubtedly emerges from this momentous period in Western culture is the towering figure of Kant, who has since epitomised the Enlightenment, and whose philosophy powerfully shaped the nature of *modernity*. In his quest to discover the 'supreme principle of morality', Kant reconciled the experiential approach of empiricism with the universality of the new physics, and his search for intellectual clarity led him to assert his belief in fundamental principles of *human dignity*, *rationality* and *freedom*. His ideas still articulate widely recognised rules of *mutual respect* and a person's inherent right to pursue meaning and fulfilment in life.

The hopes that the Enlightenment ideal created were met with a reaction to the foundationalist notions that such an enterprise was seen to embrace, bringing about a keen debate on the *nature of the human subject* and its understandings of *unquestioned universality*. To this as yet unresolved debate in our post-Kantian modernity and its complex legacy, the next chapter of this thesis now turns.

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[450] A.C. Grayling, 2004, p.131

Chapter Five

An enlightened ethos for a Post-Kantian self

Introduction

The main motivation of the Enlightenment quest was the reconciliation of the best available principles to live a good life, backed by a developing science, an appeal to reason and the respect of human dignity. It promoted a clear recognition of the existence of the inalienable rights of the individual, in harmony with the principles of political rule, and succeeded in enshrining many of such rights in legislation. The more complex understanding of individual and communal rights and responsibilities that became the hallmark of liberal, democratic government in the West is an important legacy of the Enlightenment thought - one that is behind the generalised understandings of human rights that are the basis and aspirations of most present day representative governments. This significant achievement, a major turn in the *poietic* forging of our 'human nature' in the West, has nevertheless had to rise to many challenges since, and the many historical and social changes that the world has been through since this time of confident optimism have often cast doubts on the idea that an illuminated age could spread across the globe.

British historian Norman Hampson notes the symbiosis that existed during this remarkable historical and philosophical movement between economic development, social attitudes, and intellectual speculations, while suggesting that a full understanding of the nature and mode of operation of the causal relationships that produced it is almost inconceivably complex.[451] Kant's optimistic belief in the power of the Enlightenment to release humankind from its self-incurred tutelage would soon come against a familiar critique, vocally expressed by those who, like political philosopher John Gray, see the Enlightenment ideals undermining difference and cultural diversity. Similar critiques led to the idea that the ideological battles of rival universalisms had given way to differing cultural conditions, habits and traditions; even to what Fukuyama grandly predicted as the 'end of history.'[452]

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[451] Norman Hampson, 1968, 'Preface', *The Enlightenment*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Ringwood, Vic., pp.9-13

[452] John Gray, 1997, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, Routledge,

'The twentieth century', Isaac Kramnick remarks, 'with two cataclysmic wars, the madness of the Holocaust and Stalin's *gulags*, has tragically tried the Enlightenment liberal's faith in reason and optimistic belief in progress.' Marx and Engels were themselves products of Enlightenment optimism, and yet, the 'kingdom of reason' that it promised, Engels wrote, 'was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie.'[453] Freud and his followers also in their own way contributed to disenchantment with Enlightenment assumptions about rationality, while the Marxist critique was echoed by the Parisian avant garde, particularly in Michel Foucault's and Jean-Francois Lyotard's work.[454]

A more subtly expressed critique of the Enlightenment was made by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, lament that 'the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.'[455] Following Adorno, many other thinkers argued against the Enlightenment's faith in progress, instrumental reason, science, and human liberation. Writing from a Marxist perspective, Adorno, Horkheimer, and their later disciple Herbert Marcuse, connected the project of the Enlightenment with late-capitalist 'administered society.' All of these writers saw the Enlightenment's claim to have demystified the world transformed into *bourgeois domination*. The Enlightenment's 'disenchantment' of nature, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, bore its final fruit in Auschwitz, as noted earlier.

Enlightenment thinkers, following Kant, were driven in their attempts to face what Charles Taylor has called 'the challenge of inadequacy' in our secular modernity, which means that we have to continually redefine 'what the dignity that inheres in us as rational or expressive beings, or *the good* involved in our immersion in nature, consists in.'[456] Taylor is perhaps the philosopher who best describes the passage of the self to modernity, a *poietic* journey that is fraught with the many tensions,

London and New York.; Francis Fukuyama, 1990, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth

[453] Isaac Kramnick, 1995, 'Introduction', *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed., Isaac Kramnick, Penguin Books, 1995, pp.xxi

[454] Foucault viewed the Enlightenment reason articulated by a careful 'silencing' of what he called 'unreason', where nominally progressive modes of treatment were in fact dissimulated efforts to control and 'discipline' society. Lyotard dispensed with all 'myths of progress' altogether, claiming that all have foundered on a specious 'grand narrative.' Isaac Kramnick, 1995, p.xxii

[455] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1972/1992, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Translated by John Cumming, (English translation first published by Herder & Herder, New York, 1972) Verso third edition, London, 1992, p.3

[456] Charles Taylor, 1989, pp.317-18. Emphasis added

reactions and resistances to the 'immanent order' that contests the values of the Enlightenment, while affirming the self's rationality and autonomy. The knowledge and awareness that Taylor brings to these discussions is a product of his deep sense of historical continuity, of the currents and counter currents in which the modern self struggles to affirm *the highest moral goods* in an age where materialism and scientific naturalism play a complex part, revealing and eclipsing at once the spiritual forces that have imbued our 'human nature' with a commitment to articulate our moral sources.

In a manner similar to Gray, Alisdair MacIntyre believes that the worthy aspirations of the Enlightenment project were simply impossible to fulfil, and that therefore the self that the Enlightenment had promised to liberate was doomed to be inauthentic.[457] The philosophical attempt to find a *rational basis for moral beliefs* in a particular understanding of 'human nature' could not be reconciled with the inherited set of moral injunctions, and the conception of 'human nature' which had been 'expressly designed to be discrepant with each other.' Unable to fully apprehend their own peculiar historical and cultural tradition, eighteenth century moral philosophers were in this view faced with 'the impossible and quixotic character of their self-appointed task.'[458]

This chapter aims to bring some of the aspects of the Enlightenment contested legacy into a clearer focus, as it argues that the ideals that motivated this movement still exert their force and influence in Western thought and continue to enable the contemporary conceptions of our *selfhood*, our *personal identity*, and our *moral and political agency*. The new critical rationality that has come to characterise the uncertainty of our fluid postmodern condition, together with an awareness of our human limitations, has opened new opportunities and more realistic ways to ground our values, in what is beginning to shape like a renewed *enlightened ethos* for our post-Kantian modernity.

Taylor and Kahn have seen in the *expressivist reaction* to Enlightenment instrumental rationality, the *origins of modernity*. In a dynamic that sees modernity as a product of

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[457] Alasdair MacIntyre, 1985, *After Virtue*, *A Study in Moral Theory,* Second (corrected) edition with Postscript, Duckworth, London, p.54
[458] *Ibid*, pp.54-55

modernism, Kahn and Pippin link the Enlightenment project to new understandings of *cultural diversity* and *subjectivity*, as well as *individual morality*. Thomas Osborne proposes a renewed attitude that challenges the social sciences to adopt a 'self-conscious *enlightenmentality*' that rescues what is worth recovering from *the* Enlightenment ideals. In this perspective, an integration of *the social sciences* and *the natural sciences* is seen as paramount, and this is also an important argument that this thesis advocates, so that a better informed account of what constitutes the complexity of our 'human nature' can be developed.

Stephen White suggests that a 'late-modern ethos' can address the predicament that he sees democracy facing in our time. White's project elaborates *a variant* of Taylor's account of the *sources of the self*, and provides a welcome framework to trace back, and review, the salient ideas of Taylor's approach to the question of how best to live our lives in our modern, secular age, in a plausible alternative, or complement rather, to Taylor's views on the 'malaise' of modernity. The *redefined modern self* advanced by White, in the path opened by Taylor and enriched by other philosophical outlooks, is seen as the '*capacious subject*' of late-modernity; or as Karl Smith's self, equally capable of 'deep engagement' with the principles outlined above. Like Taylor and White, Smith is also concerned with *the rational* as much as *the empathic*, or *relating* aspect of our modern self, and both of these approaches reach beyond the concerns of self-formation to the role of this *deep self*, re-engaged in the making of community.

What is the right path for our modern self to follow as it continues its journey? How can we best preserve our rationality and our disengagement, our autonomy, without having to anchor these faculties in either outmoded religiosity or stern morality? Can there be a deeper, but also a gentler, fuller, *more ethical way* for us to live 'the good life', and can this *new ethos* be extended to peoples of other nations and communities? Is this life compatible with the ambivalence and uncertainty of our contemporary existence? How can we deal with this condition and arrive at the *postmodern wisdom* that Bauman sees as an opportunity for us to attain? Can we resolve the tension between autonomy and self-realisation and the impulse towards an objective and rational view of the world? These are important questions that now, like in earlier historical times, seem to occupy human beings; questions that demand increasingly our attention, in a dynamic between the self-knowledge that we have

come to take for granted, and the possibilities that seem to open ahead of us, suggesting better ways of shaping our 'human nature' into a future that is fuller, in every sense. The figure of *dignity* and *respect* intimated by Kant continues to find currency in these discussions, as we struggle to articulate *the values* that we hold dear for this, our post-Kantian, modern self.

5.1 Examining our post-Kantian modernity

Joel Kahn returns to the topic of modernity, describing it in a more recent work as a process that is mutually *inclusive* and *exclusive*, open to change over time.[459] As he sets out to investigate this process in British, American and Malaysian contexts, Kahn begins with a well-known definition of modernity, following the understanding of a broadly shared Hegelian, Marxist and Weberian tradition that sees modernity as an 'objective, identifiable socio-historical process of transformation out there in the world', that begins in the Enlightenment.[460]

In this context, the notions of culture in recent *modernist theory* - Kahn's use of this term is complementary to that of modernity - are important. According to Kahn, *modernity* is constructed 'in an ambivalent/interrogating modernism.' Most of the post-Kantian theorists, Kahn remarks, in a manner similar to MacIntyre, find a point of conflict between two opposing visions: one, of an 'infinitely expanding rational mastery', and the other one, of 'the individual and collective aspiration to autonomy and creativity.' These opposing visions are nevertheless interconnected and essential to modernity.[461]

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[459] Joel S. Kahn, 2001, *Modernity and Exclusion*, Sage Publications, London
[460] *Ibid*, p.9. Kahn follows this with a passage by Bryan Turner, where modernity is seen as a 'Process of modernization, by which the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularisation, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the lifeworld, the bureaucratisation of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values. Modernity therefore [is seen to arise] with the spread of Western imperialism in the sixteenth century; the dominance of capitalism in northern Europe…in the early seventeenth century; the acceptance of scientific procedures…; and pre-eminently with the institutionalisation of Calvinistic practices and beliefs in the dominant classes of northern Europe. We can follow this process further through the separation of the family from the wider kinship group, the separation of the household and the economy, and the creation of the institution of motherhood in the nineteenth century. Although the idea of the citizen can be traced back to Greek times via the independent cities of the Italian states…, the citizen as the abstract carrier of universal rights is a distinctly modern idea.' (Kahn quotes here from 'Periodization and politics in the postmodern', in Bryan S. Turner , 1990, ed., *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*, Sage, London, p.6)
[461] Joel S. Kahn , 2001, pp.9-10

The conception of modernity as a product of contradictory or conflicting cultural processes contravenes the classical narratives of modernisation. If modernisation results in a loss of meaning, while modern *subjectivity* is also reduced to a single logic of rationalisation, commodification, or abstraction, how can a genuinely *reflexive modernism* ever be achieved? The 'core of the culturalist model of modernity' can be traced back, as Kahn argued in his earlier work, to the first critical intellectual encounter with modernisation, the Romantic critique of Enlightenment philosophy, and its instrumental notions of human reason.[462] The profound ambivalence towards the modern is nevertheless coupled, as Kahn has also observed, with some idea of how it also generates the possibilities for 'forms of human community not characterised by the continual search for advantage and personal gain.'[463] It is not hard to find in the ambivalence of such an encounter the same kinds of arguments that have plagued Cartesian rationalism, and which, as Kahn has often emphasised, similarly generate our modern understanding of universal human rights.

Modernity as dialectic: 'an unending modernity'

In the social and intellectual tradition of Enlightenment modernity, Pippin, like Kahn and Taylor, also finds those momentous developments in European history that are by now familiar to us all.[464] From another perspective, modernity's great problem, as seen by a line of thinkers from Baudelaire to Nietzsche, Pippin claims, was 'that it had not been modern enough.' In this view, the 'restless, perpetually self-transforming, anomic, transient spirit of modernism' had to be affirmed much more consistently, and not qualified by the residual Christian moralism of Kant or the

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[462] *Ibid*, pp.11-12
[463] Joel S. Kahn, 2001, p.14
[464] Pippin describes these developments as follows: 'The emergence of the "nation state", a political unit constituted by a common language and tradition, with an authority transcending local feudal fealty and based on some explicit common representative, even, eventually, on some self-understanding or principle; more and more ambitious claims for the supreme authority of reason in human affairs, contra the claims of tradition, the ancestors, and, especially, the Church; claims for the authority of natural science (modelled basically on mathematical physics) in the investigation of nature (including human nature); the corresponding "demystification" of life, especially natural phenomena; an insistence on the natural rights of all individuals, above all else the right to freedom, the maximum expression of an individual's self-determination; the domination of social life by a free market economy, with its attendant phenomena of wage labor, urbanization, and the private ownership of the means of production; a belief in, if not the perfectibility, then at least the improvability of mankind, and a commitment (at least within the official culture) to a variety of virtues that originate in Christian humanism: tolerance, sympathy, prudence, charity, and so on.' (Pippin, Robert B., 1999 ,'Introduction: The Modernity Problem', in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, p.4)

sobriety, calculation, and prudence typical of thinkers like Smith or Locke - or not even by the modern hope for the public authority of philosophy and science in culture as a whole.[465]

Pippin finds the *issue of legitimacy* deeply entangled in the question of how to interpret modernity's *historical origins*. Hegel provides the first attempt to think through Kant's achievement in 'epochal' terms, and Hegel's general idea of *self-determination* or *self-grounding* as the principle of modernity is, according to Pippin, as fundamental to the modern authority of natural science as it is to modern claims for liberal-democratic institutions.'[466] This interpretation is by Pippin's own admission a rather non-standard reading of Kant and Hegel, as he raises the issue of modernity in a way not represented by either 'those with some hope for a partial revival of a pre-modern perspective; those 'very non-traditional, and highly qualified defenders of modernity'; or those in a third category who are 'convinced that a postmodern age is either upon us', and those who think that it ought to be 'hastened or resisted.'[467]

The philosophical *problem of modernity*, the nature of *the problem of autonomy*, Pippin concludes, lies in 'both the independence and the dependence or finitude of modern communities and individuals.' These assertions lead to Nietzsche and Heidegger's doubts and their impact of their views on the question of subjectivity and modernity.[468] One can best understand the modern ideal as a realisation that what had been taken to be absolute and transcendent was in fact *contingent* and *finite*. This implies that the *limitations* of human *self-determination*, and the consequent ideological pretensions of the modern assertion of human power, need to be seen as linked, or determined to a great extent, by our natural, *biological, ecological, historical,* and *ontological boundaries*.

We can think of *the modern ethos* as 'always as self-deflating as self-inflating', and as

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[465] *Ibid*, pp.6-7
[466] Robert B. Pippin 1999, p.12. This philosophical context also made it possible for much of what is distinctive in modernist art, particularly in the 'intense philosophical self-consciousness' of the likes of Manet, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Wagner, Eliot, Pound, and so many others, for whom the pursuit of some self-consciously held aesthetic idea was paramount, Pippin, in a manner similar to Taylor, also argues.
[467] *Ibid*, p.14. Pippin situates in the first category Arendt, Strauss and MacIntyre; in the second, Habermas, Rorty, Toulmin, and Taylor; and in the third group, Heidegger, Lyotard, Vattimo, and Jameson, as representative, with 'many others.'
[468] *Ibid*, pp.162-7

both at the same time, as we continue to feel uneasy with anyone pretending to define who or what we truly are. We can thus expect a continuation of the 'groundless search for reconciliation with other self-conscious agents unavoidable in modernity.' This also means that the very notion of *epochality* or the closure and *determining force* implied by some epochal view of history, is foreclosed. Ironically and paradoxically, modernity can then be seen as 'the last epoch', the end of epochality itself - as we live our lives in an unending modernity.[469]

Post-Modernity: 'modernity coming of age'

One way of sustaining a modified claim for the *rationality* and *autonomy* of the self without losing some of the critical understandings of this legacy, is to look at the Enlightenment as a *continuation* of, rather than a break with, modernity. Zygmunt Bauman points to the *ambivalent* and seemingly contradictory nature of post-modernity, which is, in this view:

…modernity looking at itself at a distance rather than from the inside, making a full inventory of its gains and its losses, psychoanalysing itself, discovering the intentions it never before spelled out, finding them mutually cancelling and incongruous. Post-modernity is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility; a self-monitoring modernity, one that consciously discards what it was once unconsciously doing.[470]

Post-modernity is therefore, 'modernity coming of age.' It is the very desire for *order* and the need to *control nature* and *define humankind*, characteristic of modernity, which leads to a constant intensification of the experience of ambivalence, and modernity's 'waste.' Faced with the complex choices that modernity has set before us, the solution is to accept its complexity and learn to deal with its ambivalence.[471]

Bauman has more recently characterised the transition to the post-modern as moving to a light and 'liquid' condition, in which 'there are dangers, as well as opportunities, mixed blessings', as attitudes towards freedom and individualism change, with the

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[469] *Ibid,* pp.178-79
[470] Zygmunt Bauman quoted in Anthony Elliott, 1996, *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Post-modernity,* Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, p.5
[471] Zygmunt Bauman, 1990, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Oxford, Polity, p.15.

potential for social cohesion and solidarity.[472] We can already see a notion of a
'*postmodern ethics*' in Bauman's earlier work, in which he comes very close to
Habermas' own view of the importance of the Other, or 'the earthquake of the Third',
as Bauman calls it, and which in turn is also reminiscent of Levinas' philosophy.[473]

It might be more useful, therefore, to see the interconnections between modernity and
post-modernity as a condition where both orders are simultaneously deployed, or as
one uninterrupted continuum. This is also the view held by Anthony Elliot, who in his
Subject to Ourselves examines current debates about modernity and post-modernity
from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory.[474] Elliot too believes that our
contemporary culture revolves around a *modernist impulse* for creating order,
boundaries and classifications as well as a *post-modern tolerance* for plurality,
difference and uncertainty, with the two impulses in a mutual but productive tension.

The force of modernity is without doubt still present in our contemporary lives, and
its impulse can be seen as *an opening out* to the full, complex and contradictory realm
of personal and social experience. If there are no longer wholly undisputed codes that
dictate our behaviour in our personal and social space, neither are there unrealistic
hopes; what remains is something akin to *an ethical aspiration*, which according to
Bauman has the potential to lead us to a kind of 'post-modern wisdom':

> The post-modern mind does not expect any more to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula
> of life without ambiguity, risk, danger and error, and is deeply suspicious of any voice that promises
> otherwise. The post-modern mind is aware that each local, specialized and focused treatment, effective
> or not when measured by its ostensible target, spoils as much as, if not more than, it repairs. The post-
> modern mind is reconciled to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay. This
> is, in the broadest of outlines, what can be called post-modern wisdom.[475]

We can perhaps find a way to rescue and revivify some of the most valuable
Enlightenment concepts, grounded in a new ethos, one that can lead us through 'the

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[472] Zygmunt Bauman, 2000, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK., p.90
[473] See Zygmunt Bauman, 1993, *Postmodern Ethics*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, Mass. Also Emmanuel Levinas, 1998/2006, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*, Translated from the French by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, Continuum, The Athlone Press Ltd., London, 2006.
[474] Anthony Elliott, 1996, *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford, p.22.
[475] Zygmunt Bauman, 1993, *Post-modern Ethics*, p.245

messiness' of our human predicament, so that we may live worthy and fulfilling lives, *the good life* that our self desires.

5.2 'Human nature' in an enlightened vision for the social sciences

Thomas Osborne has similarly examined our modernity in the light of the values that most Western societies have taken as their ruling principles since the eighteenth century. In his work, Osborne focuses on the social sciences as 'putative agencies of enlightenment', while finding that the will to enlightenment itself, the double relation in which the social sciences are implicated as subject *and* object of enquiry, problematises this notion.[476] This gives rise to the two, and different versions of enlightenment, the 'historical' and the 'attitudinal.'[477]

The *historical version*, well covered by writers like Norman Hampson and Peter Gay, but also notably by Ernst Cassirer,[478] gives the familiar picture that characterised the Enlightenment thinkers' passion for 'the application of reason to all things, a love of science, a belief in and commitment to progress, the distrust of all superstition and the religious organisation of life, and a veritable faith in the powers of freedom to improve the human condition and bring humanity ever closer to a realization of its essential nature.' Osborne, like the writers we have so far discussed, also sees limitations of equating 'enlightenment', and particularly *the* Enlightenment, with 'sociological rationalism' or with rationalism of whatever kind, so as to avoid 'the quagmire of denunciations of the social uses of reason in any form.'[479]

Osborne takes up Foucault's definition of 'enlightenment' as a kind of *ethos*, or 'attitude', in his concern to capture the *reflexive character* of enlightenment itself. This is a stimulus for Osborne to move towards a 'realist' and pragmatic view that implies that we are *committed to enlightenment*.[480] Putting enlightenment *in question* however, as Osborne also suggests, allows us to look at the likes of John Gray's

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[476] Thomas Osborne, 1998, 'Introduction: Of enlightenmentality', *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth*, UCL Press, Limited, London, pp.1-2
[477] Comte's ideal of a sociology that would replace philosophy as the queen of the sciences has not materialised, Osborne remarks, while he claims that some 'practitioners of the social sciences' believe that the ideal of enlightenment has proved itself to be more of an iron-cage than a realm of freedom, in a clear reference to Weber
[478] Ernst Cassirer, 1951, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. Koelln & J. Pettegrove, Princeton University Press, New Jersey
[479] Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.3
[480] *Ibid*, p.9

position of post-enlightenment, eschewing the aspirations of perfectibility in the ideals that come from the period that he surveys, as one that 'simply cannot be anti-enlightenment', because it is not an irrationalist position to hold.[481]

The subject matter of a critical analysis of enlightenment *and* of social theory, Osborne declares, should be '*human nature*', rather than a science of society as such. He therefore proposes to look at the practices of enlightenment that we already have, with a realist perspective that involves a 'worldly' attitude to enlightenment. His enquiry focuses on three domains, representing the 'substantive' aspects of enlightenment which he finds associated with *science*, *therapeutics* and *art* - the domains that the social sciences have been drawn to.[482]

Osborne's enquiry starts from the regulative ideal that 'humans might be wholly given over to culture, to self-definition from the ground up.' This is also an *ethical project*, insofar as it is a perspective that would, in effect, 'will humans' to become cultural beings. It enjoins humans to *a renewal of cultural imagination*, deliberately placing in question certain aspects of our cultural make-up, in the belief that with renewed powers of judgement, the idea of a critique of enlightenment may be seen in terms of 'moral education.'[483] Following John Stuart Mill, Osborne also believes that since truth requires something like *a relation to self*, to take an ethical view on truth is thus to stress that truth is 'both an obligation and a labour.' In this sense, Descartes' *Meditations*, Osborne argues, can be seen as 'ethical exercises in a certain style of submission to the truth.'[484]

The 'legitimatory function' of *truth* as an arbiter of judgement in relation to conduct, provides the reason to call it ethical. The transformation of truth in political philosophy, Osborne claims, has taken us to a new *ascetic attitude*, one that he would

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[481] Clearly Gray believes in justice and the good society still, as does Richard Rorty, who questions the belief in the possibility of Enlightenment foundations, and many other thinkers along the same lines. This foundational discussion, in Osborne's view, also includes other critics, such as Dews, Habermas, Hoy and McCarthy, and Kelly, who have with 'good intentions, sophisticated analyses and non-starters', engaged in what Osborne thinks has been misleadingly called the 'Foucault-Habermas debate.'
[482] Thomas Osborne, 1998, pp.10-11
[483] *Ibid*, pp.14-16
[484] *Ibid,* p.26. Even Heidegger, in his later philosophical writings, argued for a deeper, more 'meditative' kind of truth that is worth more than propositional thought or truth of a calculative kind, even though this claim could be seen as anti-scientific, or possibly mystical.

like to see taken up in sociology.[485] This attitude involves adopting an anthropological point of view and reflecting on the current state of human nature, as it raises the *possibility of our contingency*, or at least, our changeability. Envisioned this way, our 'human nature' has an *infinite capacity* to invent new forms of freedom for itself; 'a utopia of our capacities rather than of our society', an *ethical*, rather than a *sociological* picture of utopia.[486]

A view of scientific enlightenment

Osborne's views on *science* as an *aspect* of enlightenment fill an important gap in other critical analyses of modernity, and this is the reason for to turn to them at this point in our discussion. For Osborne, a realist view of science entails not taking the traditional rationalist perspective of both the philosophy and the sociology of science, but rather viewing science as an '*aspiration of enlightenment.*' Seen in this manner, 'at the level of the spirit or the ethos of science', Osborne argues that scientific enlightenment is a limited, rather than 'a universal thing.' Even though the very idea of science 'has ethical preconditions', science, he claims, has no intrinsic or inevitable moral implications of its own.[487]

According to Osborne, the social sciences 'have tended to take a rather vexed view of science.' The trends towards relativism, anti-foundationalism and postmodernism that have characterised the social study of science in the past few decades 'appear to make of natural science either just another language game, or an enterprise that is more or less fraudulent in its exaggerated claims for itself.'[488] In his vindication of *scientific enlightenment*, or at least, as he puts it, 'the idea of such an idea,' Osborne discerns in the likes of Bruno Latour,[489] for instance, and other 'relativist analysts of science', a

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[485] *Ibid*, pp.27-33
[486] *Ibid*, p.36
[487] *Ibid*, p.12
[488] *Ibid*, p.41
[489] See, for example, Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1999. This collection also reveals the accompanying preoccupations that have continued to appear in Latour's subsequent books and articles, including his more recent *Politics of Nature: How to bring the Sciences into Democracy,* translated from the French original and published by Harvard University Press in 2004. Latour describes a situation where modern human beings have come to posit an 'outside world' totally disconnected from an 'inner world' as a strategy for addressing the same questions that troubled our predecessors. In order to explain our inner, subjective reality, we have invented the 'scientific fact', with its 'pale and bloodless objectivity', as an attempt, according to Latour, to confirm the nature of reality and give our existence a much-needed certainty. (Bruno Latour, 1999, pp.11-12) The thrust of Latour's argumentation

particular orientation to an ethics of truth that can serve to praise science rather than to damn it.

The anti-enlightenment perspective on science that Osborne sees in some critical traditions derives from the idea that science has disseminated beyond its legitimate confines and has resulted, in what Weber called 'the conquest of life by science.' Those sociologists and others who have taken an *epochal attitude* to their times have been particularly taken with this idea, in which Western modernity comes to be seen in terms of scientific organisation and rational bureaucracy; perceived as the dominance of science over society, which naturally raises alarm. On the other hand, there is the view that the nature of modern societies can be read off from the nature of science, a rather romantic view that overdramatises the effects of science and tends towards the prejudice of anti-science.[490]

Osborne is more concerned to emphasise *the spirit of humanism* in science, noting that while not all enlightenment takes a scientific form, there are 'enlightening lessons to be learned from the specific example of science.' Like Taylor, he too goes back to Condorcet, seeing in the idealistic *Esquisse* something like 'the proper ethos of science' which illustrates its author's 'epistemological modesty of approach.'
In short, science *is* significant, Osborne believes, not least as a *model of knowledge*, but we need to think in terms that are less akin to the aspirations of the orthodox, epochalist sciences of society. The model that the social sciences should follow, as with natural science, is based on 'epistemological modesty', rather than hubris. Thus, for Osborne, 'science is the product not simply of a rational response to the natural world but of certain kinds of human commitment.'[491]

Two important notions are also implicated in this view of science, following Gaston Bachelard, the great French philosopher of science: the notion of '*convergence*' and the '*principle of fallibilism.*' Because it is implicit that there exists some kind of *truth*

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and the significance of his work - particularly seen from the perspective of the humanities - lies in his attempts to dispel the aura of infallibility that, in his view, accompanies some understandings of science, and which runs the danger of degenerating into unquestioned scientism. He therefore thinks that the only way in which to address the assumed objectivity of scientific discoveries and what is generally presumed to be their undisputed certainty is to start from the premise that we can only be '*relatively* sure of many of the things with which we are daily engaged through the practice in our laboratories,' as opposed to being '*absolutely* sure of the reality of the outside world.'
[490] *Ibid,* p.43
[491] *Ibid,* p.47

'on which science itself will converge', convergence sees science as an enterprise that is oriented towards the future. The principle of fallibilism holds that the truth is always up for correction, 'that science is an ongoing search for truth – a project, without closure, existing beyond the immediate activities of its proponents', as Bachelard defined such a project, early in the twentieth century:

Scientific truth is a prediction or, better still, a predication. By announcing the scientific truth we call for a meeting of minds; together we convey both an idea and an experience, we link thought to experience in an act of verification: *The scientific world is therefore that which we verify*. Above the *subject* and beyond the *object*, modern science is based on the *project*. In scientific thought the subject's meditation upon the object always takes the form of a project.[492]

Science is thus not a 'conception' of the world as much as *an ethical attitude* towards it, and such an attitude involves 'an evaluative rather than just a normative or rationalist orientation towards the world.' Accordingly, it does not make sense to regard science as being in opposition to ethics, since for science to work as science certain broad ethical orientations are in order.[493] In this respect, Osborne remarks, any 'critique' of science has to take account of the fact that 'science is already a form of critique.'[494] And from these discoveries, even when provisionally integrated into common practice - since it is the nature of science to engage in an *ongoing critical correction of concepts* - humanity has, on the whole, continued to benefit.

The above conclusion does not obviate the need to distinguish between the idea of science 'in the making', and 'a critical sociology of science' concerned with the social and institutional *effects* of science 'already made'; one that explores the collusions of science with the machinations of power, not just in cases such as the development of weaponries and 'defence', but in areas of expertise such as the administration of food hygiene or the regulation of industrial hazards.[495] Latour's relativist ethic, to name an

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[492] From Gaston Bachelard, 1934/1984, *The New Scientific Spirit,* pp.11-12, quoted in Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.48
[493] Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.48
[494] *Ibid,* p.54
[495] Latour's turn has contributed to such an exploration, even though his approach has produced mixed reactions in his readers – the author of this thesis among them. Osborne claims that 'the Latourian problematic' has not changed the received image of science very much in epistemological terms, since the old demarcation between natural science and the social sciences remains intact. Nevertheless, Osborne sees in Latourianism the epitome, 'albeit a deliberately eccentric epitome', of a critique of scientific enlightenment because 'it allows science to speak against the very forms of *romanticism* that it is apt to generate about itself.' (Osborne, Thomas, 1998, p.61)

example of this kind of thinking, has its cost nevertheless. In its refusal to contemplate that science might be analysed at the level of concepts, which is to say, 'at the level of its own internal historicity', Osborne remarks, Latour has trouble in perceiving 'the kinds of ethical relations that are required to do science in the first place.' He thus ignores the fact that science itself *is* 'an ethical choice made in the world by certain people called scientists.'[496]

Osborne's treatment of the *moral element* in science follows closely Michael Polanyi's characterisation of science as a certain 'stylization of conscience.' This requires that the scientist, in judging phenomena, is able to reconcile 'the cognitive virtues of speculation with the rigorous, trained rules of precision and method.' We might therefore think of *the scientific ethos* in terms of a more *general consciousness of freedom*, defined as enlightenment.[497] Scientists, in this view, are 'obliged to be free', but such freedom has to be learned in particular contexts, in relation to particular problems, and tempered with the conscience of rigour, and methodological and speculative restraint. The nexus between *science* and *democracy* can be seen as embedded in this formulation - the subject of another fascinating discussion. Osborne concludes his discussion of a scientific ethos agreeing with Weber that although science may be ethical, it is also, unlike religion, 'ethically meaningless in its more general consequences.' Going possibly a bit too far, Weber also launched what can only be seen as a satirical attack:

Who - aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences - still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the meaning of the world?[498]

This is a statement that calls for an informed, perhaps less biased response, which this thesis will endeavour to elaborate in part, as it continues to address the question of our ethical search for meaning in its next chapter.

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[496] Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.65. Ethics and morality are basic to our understanding of ourselves and our actions. Science is a method that continues to contribute to such an understanding, and as such, deserves further attention. The next chapter of this thesis engages with some of these ideas, and addresses the mistaken notion of scientific 'infallibility', which Latour suggests accompanies some views on science
[497] *Ibid*, pp.66-67. These remarks are based on Michael Polanyi's 1946 publication, *Science, faith and society*, Oxford University Press, London.
[498] From Max Weber, 1919, 'Science as a vocation' , in *From Max Weber*, H. Gerth & C.W. Mills (eds. and trans).1991, Routledge, London, quoted by Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.69

For the moment, however, it is sufficient to note that Osborne's proposal for a reconfiguration of social theory that makes room for science is of great significance. This renewed vision of enlightenment is an *ethical commitment* to an *ongoing critique*, together with the recognition that it cannot be grounded in any ultimate claims to truth. Given that our current debates over truth are testimony to the persistence of enlightenment and not to its demise, we should perhaps think, as Osborne does, that 'it is only our practices of interpretation' with regard to those debates that still leave something to be desired.[499]

5.3   The 'deep subject' of secular modernity in Charles Taylor

From 'cosmos to universe': a change in our cosmic imaginary

What characterises modern societies, according to Charles Taylor, is not simply a debate between belief and unbelief, but a turn in the middle or later nineteenth century that made it possible for new positions, or spaces to be carved for *unbelief*. The gamut of alternatives to faith becomes richer and wider at this time, making this turn *qualitatively deeper*, for 'the unbelieving outlooks', as Taylor notes, are 'more deeply anchored in the lifeworld and background sense of reality' in the nineteenth-century among most people than the analogous views of their eighteenth century predecessors.[500]

This new *secularity* is a product of what Taylor describes as a change in the 'cosmic imaginary.' The *social imaginary* gathers the generally shared background understandings of society that make it possible for it to function as it does, and the ensemble of ways we imagine the world we live in. And just as the social imaginary consists of the understandings which make sense of our social practices, so the '*cosmic imaginary'* makes sense of the ways in which the surrounding world figures in our lives. These are the ways, for instance, Taylor tells us, that it figures in our religious images and practices, including explicit cosmological doctrines; in the

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[499] Thomas Osborne, 1998, p.194
[500] Charles Taylor, 2007, The Dark Abyss of Time', *A Secular Age*, pp.322-3

stories we tell about other lands and other ages; in our ways of marking the seasons and the passage of time; in the place of 'nature' in our moral and/or aesthetic sensibility; and in our attempts to develop a 'scientific' cosmology, if any.[501]

The modern, Western society, a product of the knowledge, history and traditions of the north Atlantic nations in the main, is always at the centre of Taylor's discussion. The change that he sees taking place in 'our' *cosmic imaginary* can then be broadly described as the replacement of a Scripture-derived narrative, already implied in some aspects of the classical Greek cosmology, with the one that arises from the *scientific discoveries* associated with recent *evolutionary theory*. To understand this change, Taylor suggests that we need to follow the transformations of both science and imaginary, for it is only then that we will find that such narrative does not accept the simplest 'secularisation story' that *science by itself* determines modern unbelief.[502]

In his own securalisation account, Taylor, like Osborne, also pays tribute to the science that powered the Enlightenment. He begins his depiction of the transformation from *cosmos to universe* with a somewhat poetic evocation of an image from the great French naturalist Buffon, who in his own theory of evolution saw humans issuing from a 'dark abyss of time.' The force of this image derives from the realisation that the vast expanse of time that lies behind us, lit up by countless stars, 'hides the process of our genesis, of our coming to be.' We contemplate the immense universe of galaxies in the aeons of time, and in attempting to explore them, we meet 'the twilight of our own dawn.' Beyond that is 'the night from which we conscious - light-bearing - animals emerged.'[503] The remote past is not only dark in this image because it is unfathomable, but also because it precedes the emergence of the light we know, the 'conscious awareness of things.'

Taylor also recalls another scientifically inspired reflection, this time from Diderot, to further illustrate a conception of time already dominated by the sense of time linked to the evolution of all things:

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[501] *Ibid*, p.323
[502] *Ibid*, pp.325-26
[503] *Ibid*

What is our human lifetime in comparison with the eternity of time?...there is an infinite series of tiny animals inside the fermenting atom, and the same infinite series inside that other atom called Earth. Who knows what traces of animals preceded us? Who knows what races of animals will follow those that now exist?[504]

The transformation in outlook from a limited, fixed cosmos, to a vast, evolving universe that starts in the early seventeenth century is essentially completed in the early nineteenth century, with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. Diderot's passage, written the better part of a century before Darwin, highlights the magnitude of this transformation. The *evolutionary process* is as vast and hard to fathom as the abyss of time in which it unfolded.[505]

Another legacy that complicates our modern scientific understanding is *the power of nature* that we can still discern in the expressivist currents leading into modernity, as we have seen, and from which new moral understandings arose, tied to a sensibility of kinship with all other life forms.[506] The way the natural world figures in our *moral imagination* gives us an important connection. It nourishes on one hand a sense of *kinship and filiation*, since '[W]e belong to the earth; it is our home.' This sensibility is therefore a powerful source of *ecological consciousness* too, which leads us to think of ourselves as having 'a deep nature', which we need to retrieve, or perhaps overcome, by 'examining our dark genesis.'[507]

The complex of theories presented in Taylor's *Sources* aim to do this, and his more recent work continues that quest. In Taylor's view, such complexity is a product of the *scientific discovery* and the profound *cultural change* in Western societies that 'interacted and inflected each other.' We can better understand this if we think that:

… along with the idea derived from evolution that *ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis*, married to the power of the Romantic legacy, has helped to produce our sense of *the deep subject*, opaque to herself, the locus of unconscious and partly impersonal processes, who must try to find herself in the immeasurable time of a dark genesis out of the pre-human, without and within.[508]

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[504] Modified from Diderot, *Le reve D'Alembert*, trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen, in *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, (Hacket, Indianapolis and London, 2001), quoted in Charles Taylor, 2007, p.327
[505] Charles Taylor, 2007, p.327
[506] *Ibid*, pp.344-45
[507] *Ibid*, p.347
[508] *Ibid*, p.349. Emphases added

The modern cosmic imaginary cannot be captured by any one range of views. *Science*, or specifically, *materialism*, need not repudiate the awe caused by the sense that our thinking, feeling life plunges its roots into a system of unimaginable depths, from which our consciousness has emerged. Our 'dark genesis', and the accompanying tensions and conflicts we can feel around it, are best conveyed in a passage from contemporary scientist Douglas Hofstadter, who while recognising that certain people have an instinctive horror of any 'explaining away' of the soul, has found in his scientific vocation a feeling of 'cosmic awe' that others may find in religion:

I don't know why some people have this horror while others, like me, find in reductionism the ultimate religion. Perhaps my lifelong training in physics and science in general has given me a deep awe at seeing how the most substantial and familiar of objects or experiences fades away, as one approaches the infinitesimal scale, into an eerily insubstantial ether, a myriad of ephemeral swirling vortices of nearly incomprehensible mathematical activity. This in me evokes a cosmic awe. To me, reductionism doesn't 'explain away'; rather, it adds mystery.[509]

Materialism, as Taylor sees it, becomes deeper, richer and more varied in its forms, as the reasons for unbelief now go *beyond* our judgements about religion, and the supposed deliverances of science. These forms include the *moral meanings* that we now find in the universe and our genesis out of it. Materialism is nourished by certain ways of living in, and further developing, our cosmic imaginary. In this view, it can also inflect what we may perceive as the purposelessness of this vast universe, with 'our awe at, and sense of kinship with it.'[510]

The 'modern schism' and the 'immanent order' of Nature

The nineteenth century, rather than the Enlightenment, marks for Taylor the 'modern schism.' Foucault and others remarked on the watershed that the Romantic age made in European thought, with its shift to depth, whether in the economic theories of Marx

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[509] From Douglas Hofstadter, 'Reductionism and Religion', in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3, 1980, p.434, quoted by Charles Taylor, 2007, 'The Expanding Universe of Unbelief', *A Secular Age*, pp.367-68. The next chapter of this thesis takes up some of the views of Hofstadter's more recent work, while it at the same time expands on some of Taylor's notions, and particularly his feeling of awe and connection with the natural world.
[510] Charles Taylor, 2007, p.368

or the 'deep psychology' of Freud, or the genealogies of Nietzsche. In the latter, Taylor sees a turn that finds *a new moral meaning* that comes of *a rebellion* against the standard form of modern anthropocentrism, and that rejects the 'too-harmonized picture of life, in which suffering, evil and violence have been painted out.' This turn, against the values of the Enlightenment, is *resolutely naturalistic*, but is not a return to religion or the transcendent. Taylor calls it the 'immanent counter-Enlightenment.'[511]

What characterises this 'immanent' counter-Enlightenment is a rebellion against a crucial strand of '*exclusive humanism*', which Taylor nevertheless describes as 'a powerful constitutive strand of modern western spirituality as a whole.' Inheriting both the allegiance to the moral order and the affirmation of ordinary life, it provoked a revolt *from within*, against what one could call a 'secular religion of life', which has become one of the most striking features of the modern world. The complex legacy of the Enlightenment incorporates this powerful humanism, affirming the importance of preserving and enhancing life, of avoiding death and suffering, an '*eclipse/denial of transcendence*.' This exclusive humanism is at the same time accompanied by a dim historical sense that just as the secular Enlightenment humanism grew out of the earlier Christian, agape-inspired affirmation of ordinary life, so the immanent counter-Enlightenment grew out of its transcendent-inspired predecessor.[512]

The notion of *the immanent order of nature* which Taylor sees as characterising Western secularism leaves open the question of whether this whole order had a deeper significance. It involved 'denying, or at least isolating and problematising any form of interpretation between the things of Nature on one hand, and "the supernatural" on the other', be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, of gods or spirits, or magic forces. In this view, the inner/outer distinction also leads to ask whether the best life involves our seeking or acknowledging, or serving 'a good which is beyond, in the sense of independent of human flourishing.'[513] Taylor's notion of *higher-order goods* as something that takes them beyond human flourishing relates to his claim that higher goods require *strong evaluations*, and an equally strong *commitment* to

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[511] *Ibid*, pp.369-70
[512] *Ibid*, pp.372-74
[513] *Ibid*, pp.15-16

articulate them, as constitutive of *our moral sources*.[514] Articulating our moral sources has the power to give them force; we use language to make sense of our lives, even though we realise that full articulacy is always an impossibility. This means that we are only *selves* 'insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good.'[515]

For Taylor, it follows that the allegiance to the '*highest goods*' enshrined in the best of human traditions demands of us that we have an adequate framework in virtue of which we make sense of our lives *spiritually*. Part of what Taylor has called the 'malaise of modernity' lies in the fact that the modern world has made these frameworks problematic, as the dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order has allegedly destroyed the horizons in which people previously lived their spiritual lives. Weber's notion of 'disenchantment' entails a loss of meaning that Taylor seeks to redress with his call to articulation. This is also the quest to attain meaning amid multiple modernities in which 'transcendence' and its frontal denial shape a multi-cornered debate.[516]

Exclusive humanism and 'buffered' and 'porous' selves

The purely 'self-sufficient' or 'exclusive' humanism that Taylor associates with the rise of modern secularity is in sharp contrast with the one that prevailed before modernity, where human beings were beholden to a different order. That was a time when 'higher beings', like Gods or spirits, or the Ideas or the cosmopolis of Gods and humans, demanded and deserved our worship, reverence, devotion or love, and when the reverence or devotion itself was seen as integral to human flourishing.[517]

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[514] See Charles Taylor, 1989, 'Ethics of Inarticulacy', and 'Moral Sources'; chapters 3 and 4. In the concluding chapter to his *Sources*, Taylor already summarised his concern with the moral imperatives that have been the focus of most of his work, as follows: 'These emerge out of the long-standing moral notions of freedom, benevolence, and the affirmation of ordinary life, whose development I traced at some length from the early modern period through their Deist and Enlightenment forms. We as inheritors of this development feel particularly strongly the demand for universal justice and beneficence, are peculiarly sensitive to the claims of equality, feel the demands to freedom and self-rule as axiomatically justified, and put a very high priority on the avoidance of death and suffering.' (Taylor, C., 1989, p.495) Taylor has taken seriously 'the profound rifts when it comes to the constitutive goods, and hence moral sources which underpin these standards.' He, like Stephen White, who follows Taylor closely and extends some of his notions, (as we shall see from discussion of his work later in this chapter), sees the 'lines of battle' as multiple and bewildering, and throughout this particular work and in *A Secular Age*, he is concerned to elucidate such matters.
[515] Charles Taylor, 1989, 'The Self in Moral Space', pp.33-35
[516] Charles Taylor, 2007, 'A Secular Age – Introduction', p.20
[517] *Ibid*, 'Introduction', p.18

Never dogmatic, however, and yet committed as he is to a particular *theistic outlook*, Taylor's intellectual restlessness and erudition makes him always measured in judging alternative points of view. He is well aware of how 'deconstruction' and 'post-structuralism' find their roots in the nineteenth century, especially in the work of Nietzsche - whom Taylor seems to regard with respect while also being intensely puzzled by him, even more than he is by Foucault. Nevertheless, the ambivalent relation that Taylor has with the leading figures of post-modernity is always discernible and often detrimental to his own arguments, as it is never far from his efforts to show that even in unbelief there is always *an underlying core* that has its sources in the religious traditions that can be seen as its progenitors.

Regardless of what our own individual position may be on whether humanity is better off without religion,[518] we can see that Taylor's religious conviction, while passionately asserted is at the same time equally imbued with generosity, something which has commanded the respect of most of his adversaries. Be that as it may, Taylor finds in the 'exclusive humanism' of modernity a *subtraction story* that begins when society comes to be seen in secular terms and 'the fading of God's presence' can only be filled by an alternative to the fullness that Christian *agape* – the bliss that comes from the love of God and the feeling of connectedness through this love to all fellow beings – had until then provided. The power to create moral order in the modern context, according to this story, needed the active capacity to shape and fashion our world, natural and social; and importantly, it also had to be actuated by some drive to *human beneficence*.[519]

As of the late nineteenth century, the alternatives to a theistic ethic are there, in the *naturalistic materialism* that brings along very different existential conditions, as the new cosmic imaginary fashioned by the Darwinian revolution begins to impact most branches of knowledge. All this results in what Taylor sees as a 'disenchanted world', one in which 'the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds.' This is what Taylor has described as the *radical reflexivity* that signalled our Cartesian modernity. This *mind-centred view* is crucially different from the view that

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[518] We can invoke here Stephen Jay Gould's notion of the NOMA, or 'non-overlapping magisteria', which in the same open Taylorian spirit, denigrates neither science nor religion. (Stephen Jay Gould, 2002, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, Vintage, Random House Australia (Pty) Limited, Sydney)
[519] Charles Taylor, 2007, 'The Bulwarks of Belief', pp.26-28

prevailed in the 'enchanted world' of pre-modernity, where the lives of ordinary people were ruled by 'extra-human agencies' in a world of spirits, both good and bad, where meanings could reside in things, 'charged objects', imbued with spiritual power. In this earlier understanding there was no clear boundary between mind and world, or between personal agency and impersonal force. Meaning was rather in a kind of 'interspace which straddles what for us is a clear boundary.' The *boundary* of this enchanted world was accordingly '*porous*', as was *the self* that inhabited it.'[520]

The 'porous self' was previously 'open' and 'vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers', but in modernity the disengaged self is *bounded*, 'buffered.' The *buffered self* can 'form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life.' This modern self deals with inner feelings and thoughts differently, and this treatment makes *disengagement* possible. The absence of fear in this self provides an opportunity for *self-direction*. In this very different existential condition, the modern, buffered self disengages from everything outside the mind. For *the porous self*, the very notion that there is a clear boundary that allows us to define an 'inner base area' in which we can disengage from the rest had no sense. The buffered self, by contrast, seems invulnerable; and thus sees itself 'as master of the meanings of things for it.'[521] While Taylor concedes that a buffered self can be very conscious of being an individual, the *disengaged stance* that accompanies it can make it prone to *atomism*, and perhaps not readily disposed to a sense of community. In contrast, living in the porous world of our ancestors was 'inherently living socially.'[522]

There is accordingly a loss of meaning in the ordinary life of the buffered self, where the sense of reverence, of transcendence, that it found in the enchanted, pre-modern world of the porous self has disappeared. As the universe flows on in secular time, its principles of order are not related to human meaning, or at any rate, 'not immediately or evidently.'[523] But since history cannot be separated from the situation it has brought about, as Taylor well knows, he believes that we have to understand religious or spiritual life today, as the many stories of the self's passage to modernity he has so

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[520] *Ibid*, pp.32-35
[521] *Ibid*, pp.37-38
[522] *Ibid*, p.42
[523] *Ibid*, p.60

comprehensively told suggest, 'in all its different thrusts, resistances, and reactions, e.g., to discipline, homogenization.'[524] He might have a point, as far as spirituality is concerned, if we are to continue upholding the 'highest goods' enshrined in our humanistic traditions, regardless of their source.

Taylor's vast historical knowledge and his own immersion in the rich literary and artistic culture that accompanies every stage of his account inclines him to continually look for a way of reconciling the multiple directions that humanistic thought has taken since Darwin. Within the richness of his thought, however, we sense an underlying tension, as he struggles to accommodate his own particular Christian beliefs. Taylor's embrace of *pluralism* and *diversity*, and his rejoicing in all the intellectual and cultural achievements of our age stand in a certain paradoxical relation with his acknowledged task of retrieval of the sources that underlie our best conception of the self and of our moral and spiritual intuitions. His concern to articulate such intuitions is an affirmation of a particular '*ontology of the human*', which suggests that we 'should treat our deepest moral instincts, our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected, as our mode of access to the world in which *ontological claims* are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted.'[525]

Taylor's intricate story of *our human condition* can be seen as a deeply thoughtful account of the *moral goods* that underlie the basic sense of dignity, justice and respect in all human beings, and of the *ethical orientations* that he believes we, as rational, self-interpreting beings, have chosen and continue to choose, in our ongoing search for meaning. The ontological account of the self's trajectory in Taylor's *Sources* is continued in *A Secular Age*, and in these works like in most of his writings, there is a sincere preoccupation with disentangling the web of complexities that have led to the multiplicity of outlooks that he sees contribute to the 'malaise' of modernity, and with the ethical stance that will allow us to address and redefine its tensions.

Some responses to Taylor's 'malaise' of modernity

Many critics have been drawn into debates about Taylor's philosophical

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[524] *Ibid*, p.776
[525] Charles Taylor, 1989, 'Inescapable Frameworks', Part I., *Sources of the Self*, pp.7-8. Emphasis added

anthropology, or to the ontological dimension in his account of our selfhood, pointing out apparent ambiguities and contradictions. Jeremy Rayner for instance, thinks that Taylor's view of the goods that modernity has suppressed, and particularly the way he goes about the act of retrieval that he claims will enable us to live our modern identity more fully, 'harbours a crucial ambiguity that runs right through Taylor's account of modernity.'[526] Rayner also seems sceptical of Taylor's assertion that acknowledging our moral goods, and particularly in terms of a supreme good, has the force that Taylor claims it has on of our sense of identity.

The main problem that Rayner sees stems from Taylor's belief in the 'self-expressivist ideal of authentic self-development', a belief not all that explicit in *Sources*, but one that Rayner finds has a clear polemical approach in Taylor's *The Malaise of Modernity* 1991 lecture series. If Taylor's ambition is 'to make a practical intervention', Rayner thinks, as his intention to retrieve the moral sources of our modern identity shows, and if the practices he advocates are linked to the way we articulate them, we will find difficult to defend Taylor's promotion of otherwise desirable practices 'if we have only these sources to fall back on.'[527]

In his review of Taylor's *Sources*, Bernard Williams[528] also voiced what Rayner and other critics have felt about Taylor's theistic bias and the consequent ambivalence he projects. Williams recognises the intensity with which Taylor characterises our modern outlook, upholding the moral attitudes that are typical of liberal societies, but he too sees in Taylor's account of the original theistic foundation of these sources a claim that to the naturalistic and sceptical eye may not appear as obvious as Taylor's story makes it, or else it appears 'so weak that it does not offer much to the self-understanding of modern liberalism.' Williams therefore concludes that to move as determinedly as Taylor does to the transcendental level 'is to freight the moral consciousness with demands that it not only can live without, but has lived without quite successfully.'[529]

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[526] Jeremy Rayner, 1992, 'Therapy for an Imaginary Invalid: Charles Taylor and the Malaise of Modernity', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol.5, No.3, pp.145-155, Sage, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi.
[527] Jeremy Rayner, 1992, 'Therapy for an Imaginary Invalid', pp.149, 151
[528] Bernard Williams, 1990, 'Republican and Galilean', *The New York Review*, November 8, pp.45-48
[529] *Ibid,* p.47

When most critics look at Taylor's claims that strong evaluations require strong articulation, a certain inconsistency seems to arise; one which, as already mentioned, can perhaps be attributed to Taylor's own ambiguous relationship with postmodernist ideas. Taylor's quite accurate portrayal of humans as *self-expressing* and *meaning-making*, implies that self-expression and meaning making rely on whatever interpretation is central to a given community's articulation at a given point in time. Since all our cultural traditions are embedded in, and articulated in language, this also means that the manner of interpretation of what is important to us will also vary as traditions change - and particularly, as MacIntyre always contends - as they are challenged, if they are to remain vital. This therefore seems to be in direct contradiction to Taylor's anthropological demands that we take our goods as ontological givens.

This contradiction is also summed up by Hartmut Rosa in his discussion of Taylor's goods. Rosa identifies a dilemma of practical reason in Taylor's position, given that Taylor 'has a clear tendency to conflate the cultural goods with the good per se and to account for historical change in terms of progress and moral growth', among other things. This conception of practical reason holds that it is possible to judge or evaluate different *conceptions of the good* or different *ethical positions*, and to show, for example, that one form of life or individual moral standpoint is superior to another one.[530] Taylor himself, as we have seen, always allows for the possibility of *different self-interpretations*, even as he suggests that *one* consistent set of *hypergoods* could rightly be judged as more or less adequate or 'self-lucid.' But, as Rosa remarks, as soon as we allow for a plurality of ethical frameworks and hypergood conceptions, 'the problem of incommensurability and hence of relativism reappears.'[531]

Of 'deep engagement' and disengaged reason

A way of addressing Taylor's conflictive demands for the modern, secular self is perhaps to think that the 'radical reflexivity' that he claims has accompanied the disengagement of modernity cannot be the sad loss that he bemoans. The

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[530] Rosa is referring here to Taylor's paper 'Explanation and Practical Reason' for this view, in Harmut Rosa, 1995, 'Goods and Life-forms: Relativism in Charles Taylor's Political Philosophy', *Radical Philosophy* 71, May/June, pp.20-26.
[531] Harmut Rosa, 1995, p.24

introspective self-awareness that has recreated this inward dimension in the modern mind, we can argue, is on the whole a good thing, accompanied as it mostly has been by the use of reason and the advances of science in all areas that affect human life.

In a recent paper that re-examines the idea of disengaged reason, Karl Smith[532] proposes better ways of thinking about the *porous subjectivity* that Taylor associates with the enchanted pre-modern world, and particularly with the effects of disengagement that Taylor attributes to the buffered self of atomistic individualism. Smith's intention is not to reject critiques of disengaged modes of being, but rather to contextualise and relativise them 'in recognition that the practices of disengaged reasoning are in fact a major breakthrough in human cognition, and are essential to the pursuit of the good society'[533], even though they may also be used to distort or corrupt our modes of being-in-the-world.

Smith believes that the many enterprises that have contributed to what some have called the *rationalisation of religious experience*, such as Eliade, Otto, or Weber, have had the effect of reducing 'God's role in human affairs', contrary to what Taylor seems to be arguing. Once we start to rationalise religious practices, 'once we attempt to impose logical coherence/consistency on our practices *and* our conceptions of God', there is a need to radically reconceive the role of God in 'a less anthropomorphic manner.[534] Once Taylor's conception is designated by the signifier 'God', it carries 'a heavy anthropomorphic inference', says Smith. Yet, when Taylor discusses the *anthropocentric shift* away from the 'full porosity' in an enchanted world to the buffered self of disenchanted modernity, he 'skirts around the preceding anthropomorphic shift in conceptions of the deity.' His call for something *beyond* an anthropocentric conception of human flourishing is then at odds with this reference to an *anthropomorphic deity*. Like many other critics, Smith also notes the contradictory position that this implies, as despite his acceptance of plurality, 'Taylor sometimes seems to polarize the multitude of possible orientations as aligning with either

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[532] Karl Smith, 2009,'"Deep Engagement" and Disengaged Reason', *Believing in a Secular Age: the Religion, Science and Society Papers*, Paper delivered at the School of Social Sciences and Psychology Research Colloquium, Victoria University, 12 November, 2009
[533] *Ibid*, p.1
[534] Karl Smith, 'Meaning and Porous Being', *Thesis Eleven*, Number 99, September 2009, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC, p.13

exclusive humanism or some type of theism.'[535]

Smith finds that Taylor's notion of *porosity* is a 'great contribution to our understanding of intersubjectivity, or being-with (and through) – others, as an essential and inescapable dimension of being-in-the-world.' He therefore proposes that this notion can be reformulated, in order to show that we can become *more deeply engaged* in the world and with one another 'without abandoning the critical faculties that enable us to dispassionately analyse, among other things, theistic and other interpretations of our fundamental condition.'[536]

Taylor's conception of the porous being and its attempt to overcome the challenge in the inner/outer distinction that he portrays is, as Smith defines it, the constant human struggle to explain 'the mediation between the outer-world and the inner-world of the individual subject.' Many attempts, from Descartes onwards, have been made to address the complexity in what has in our time become a 'field of tensions', including those of phenomenology and hermeneutics, followed by postmodernism and feminism. Therefore, rather than arguing in favour of one side at the expense of another, we should attempt to make 'some new connections between various critiques of abstract or disengaged reason and other ways of knowing.'[537]

The orientation that Smith proposes distinguishes between two different types of 'procedural knowledge', *separate* and *connected*, which Smith sees as roughly equivalent to the disengaged/engaged pairing. One kind of procedural knowledge is best illustrated in the disengagement of Descartes' radical reflexivity and Popper's notion of falsification, corresponding to what Taylor means by disengaged reason. The alternative 'connected' form, less frequently so clearly articulated, tries to understand a particular proposition from another's perspective, connecting with their world, to understand 'where you are at, where you are coming from, and why the world looks the way it does to you…' This, Smith explains, is a close approximation to what he is trying to get at with his notion of '*deep engagement*', which be believes will go a long way towards overcoming the 'malaise' that Taylor identifies with the

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[535] *Ibid*, p.14
[536] Karl Smith, 2009, '"Deep Engagement" and Disengaged Reason', p.1
[537] *Ibid*, p.5

largely unchallenged hegemony of disengaged reason, but which will significantly do so, 'without abandoning disengaged reason and thus losing its real benefits.'[538]

We have so far examined different ways of addressing Taylor's sense that the buffered self of modernity does not fill all the requirements that could enable it to fully connect with its world and its fellow humans. It is time to turn to another author who has taken up similar concerns, extending these ideas to their logical conclusions.

5.4   A new ethos for a late-modern self oriented to 'the other'

Stephen White's work, like Taylor's, is also concerned with the ethical dimensions of modernity. In his recent publication, White addresses some of the preoccupations that result from his thoughtful engagement with Taylor's ideas, and with those of the leading figures of modernity. Seeking neither to endorse foundationalism, not to dismiss it as an illusion, his proposals aim to develop an 'ethos for a late-modern citizen.'[539] To embrace a *late-modern ethos* for the self, an individual, White suggests,

…will take seriously many of the insights that animate postmodernists; but whichever of these insights she is moved to embrace, she also knows they do not offer any truth that is capable of automatically trumping the foundationalist's convictions. Alternatively, my late-modern individual might be committed to some variant of theism; but if she is, she must also admit that there can be other ways of spiritually animating one's life that cannot summarily be dismissed as nihilistic.[540]

This late-modern individual carries his or her most fundamental commitments in a *weak* ontological fashion, which White defines as comprising 'a set of ontological figures of self, other, and the beyond human, as well as some basic conceptualisations of how those figures interrelate in terms of language, finitude, natality.' Like Taylor, White also includes in this list the articulation of our deepest sources of the self,[541] and like Taylor too, he holds that one's ontology is that to which one is most

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[538] *Ibid*, p.6. Smith, like many other critics of Taylor, finally observes that while he shares Taylor's critique of militant atheism, he cannot share his faith 'that a stronger and deeper engagement in any particular religious orientation leads to either greater fulfilment or a better society.'

[539] Stephen K. White, 2009, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

[540] *Ibid,* p.3

[541] *Ibid*, pp.3-4

fundamentally committed. This is not a surprising claim, as White owes much in his formulations to Taylor's philosophy,[542] though he qualifies this statement by adding that the depth of one's commitment does not translate immediately into 'absoluteness of conviction,' anticipating possible objections of the kind that have been levelled against Taylor.

White's notion of a late-modern ethos is mainly a proposal to address the challenges that democracies face today. As the title of his book indicates, he offers an interpretation of 'our late-modern ethical-political condition', seeking to elucidate how a distinctive spirit or *ethos of citizenship* could be part of a response to this condition. The '*ontological figures*' of the self that he identifies provide a disposition toward everyday life and the ethical and political problems encountered there, framed as a 'reasonable response' to the challenges to modern Western political thought.[543] White's orientation is relevant to our *poietic* journey, as it brings another dimension into the story of the self's continual refashioning of its capacities and powers, and thus takes the narrative of our 'human nature' further into the realm of the political, without losing sight of its ethical dimension.

Recalling Aristotle's usage of the term 'ethos' with a sense of uprightness that linked to the *moral character* of the individual lent him its authority, this term can be also invoked as something like a community sentiment, or *a collective sharing*, which has found its way into analytical philosophy, and increasingly in official public discourse, as well as popular culture.[544] Within the ontological figures animating the '*constellation*' of the kind of ethos that White proposes, the basic sense of *orientation to others* reflects the underlying figuration of *the self*.[545]

The way in which we think of ourselves as reciprocally constituted by values such as human dignity and respect is in turn linked to the question of *evaluation*, or judgement of a particular tradition. White's goal is to project an 'exemplary

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[542] White discusses 'weak ontology' in another of his works, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2000) and also refers his reader to Charles Taylor's 1989 *Sources of the Self*, in relation to the list of commitments he has just enunciated; note 8., p.114

[543] Stephen K.White 2009, 'Introduction', p.1

[544] *Ibid*, p.1 and note 1, p.113. Foucault's invocation of *ethos*, White notes, parallels Heidegger's in regard to its critical stance toward mainstream, modern understandings of both ethics and practical reason.

[545] *Ibid*, p.4

furtherance' of the tradition of Western ethical-political thought, of the range of possibilities of political life that gives it a validity that is neither internal to it nor abstractly universal, so that it may ultimately 'exert a cogency outside of its original context.'[546] A significant objective of his newly configured ethos is then to extend it as a response to those who might imaginatively renew 'our' traditions in the light of the global challenges we face now or in the future, as well as perhaps 'to those in non-Western cultures engaging in analogous efforts.'[547]

White sees Taylor as similarly elaborating a late-modern, though *theistic*, ethos, whose commitments require the belief in an *agape* that reproduces among humans God's love for creation. White's ethos is animated instead by the virtues of 'attentiveness and a gratitude toward *the presencing of being*', expressed in actions 'bearing witness to that character.' His is a position which, while basically non-theistic, is perhaps more accurately described by his own definition, as something closer to 'agonistic.'[548]

White's orientation, limited in the first instance to prosperous Western democracies with their 'relatively stable and, at times, quite admirable political traditions', includes the expectations that we act as participants in broader political wholes, in a manner similar to the way Diderot's obligation to enlightenment made him look beyond the privileged societies of France and Europe to extend his thought to the symbolic whole of humanity. White addresses what he considers the most significant challenges of late modernity in a series of responses in five interrelated 'spaces of reason.' Within each space, a core of ethical disposition is responsive to the respective challenge, animated by a set of ontological figures. The constellation of challenges, disposition, and supporting figures 'provides a minimal content in relation to which the expectations of attentiveness and self-restraint are oriented.'[549] The five interrelated spaces are each singled out and defined as follows:

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[546] From Alessandro Ferrara, *The Force of the Example: Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2008), cited in White, Stephen K., 2009, p.5
[547] Stephen K. White, 2009, p.6. The 'exemplary furtherance' here discussed would seem to have a lot in common with MacIntyre's notion of the vitality of traditions that are embedded in a specific socio-historical context, and that must be open to challenge and renewal in order to remain vital.
[548] *Ibid.* Emphasis added. White states in another note that his weak ontological position commits him to an 'agonistic' rather than an atheistic position, but that his position is one whereby he affirms a weak ontological account of being as *presencing* or *becoming* - which seems to me to have more than a Heideggerian tinge.
[549] Stephen K. White, 2009, p.8

1) where cooperation is sought involving the justice of basic social and political structures; 2) where reasons are articulated for affirming the 'foundations' or 'sources' of our ethical-political judgments and actions; 3) where insight is sought in the struggle for recognition of identity; 4) where we are called upon to expand our ethical-political imagination beyond the boundaries of the modern state to include claims to human rights and global justice on the part of distant 'others'; and finally, 5) where we argue about the prospects of democracy.[550]

A late-modern ethos of citizenship will display its full character in the *judgements* and *actions of individuals* who sustain this fivefold set of expectations. This also envisions a broader conception of *subjectivity*, with which White addresses the Western ideal of the '*capacious subject*', as one that allows our moral imagination to 'adapt to the global level of practical reason, where we are called upon to respond to the claims of distant others.' To imaginatively engage in this way, we need to revise the way we think about the core values of *human dignity, equality, and respect*, and how they are understood in relation to this figure.[551]

The *bond of humanity* in the core values that White attributes to his capacious subject is better imagined not only from an understanding of ourselves as uniquely capacious creatures, but also from a refigured understanding of ourselves 'as finite, mortal ones.' Although the context of globalisation and multiculturalism require us to think in terms of geographical and cultural distance, the insights developed through an *expansion of our moral imagination* in relation to these sites are also useful when engaging other sorts of 'symbolic distance', such as economic, racial, and sexual.

Subjectivity and ethos are linked in this way in White's conception of citizenship, in order to address the specific challenges to our democratic ideas and institutions in late modernity. These challenges relate to the rapid growth of inequality; the difficulty of finding an adequate shape and trajectory for our late-modern demos; and the growing readiness of contemporary political theory to dispute the legitimacy of the classical idea of the sovereign, autonomous demos as the ground for our democratic hopes.[552]

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[550] *Ibid*
[551] *Ibid*, pp.8-9
[552] *Ibid*, pp.9-10

Interpreting Reason

In a manner similar to Osborne, White appeals to 'a chastened but still emphatic notion of practical reason.' He takes Rawl's theory of justice 'as an aid and as a foil' to his own, seeing in this work an exemplary way of construing what it means to be reasonable, as a central component of 'a late-modern account' of justice[553] based on an underlying assumption of *human dignity* and of the *respect* that we owe each other and every human being.[554] Nevertheless, while supposing that citizens who live in a fully just state would adequately internalise Rawl's basic principles and support such an order, White finds that the matter of individual *obligation* and *motivation* is not altogether resolved in Rawls. He thus finds in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, a broader ethos that reaches *beyond* legal obligation, and that draws its cognitive and motivational force from *the moral foundation* to which he appeals; that is, 'his basic sense of what a morally progressive individual and society look like.'[555] We will no doubt be reminded here of Hume's appeal to the 'artificial', or social virtues as a source of human motivation for morality.

Finding the expectation of congruence between an individual's *judgement* and their *foundational commitment* still problematic, White turns next to Taylor's account of 'sources of the self' to offer his own variant, portraying our ethical-ontological background in a way that helps specify the sort of 'attentiveness and restraint' that a reasonable individual is required to display. As he reflects upon what is basic to human beings in their search for meaning in their lives, White appeals to the notion of *human finitude*, as do Pippin and Osborne, examining the foreknowledge of our mortality, and the way in which this impacts on our lives. White sees the activity of reflection on what concerns us most as a kind of 'periodic cognitive checkup' of *the relation* between our judgments and beliefs in everyday life and 'our considered

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[553] Such a theory finds its basis of agreement at the level of an 'overlapping consensus' between adherents to different, but reasonable, comprehensive views of the good. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993), pp.10-11, 54-60, and references in Stephen K. White, 2009, 'Reason and Ethics', p.15; note 13, p.117.

[554] Taylor has also pointed out that such an ethos, concerned as it is with a conception of justice for the basic structure of a society, has nevertheless to take account of how we go about 'living…the structures.' (in Charles Taylor 1995, *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., p.xii, cited in Stephen K. White, 2009, p.17)

[555] Mill's ethos emerges in relation to what is a basic insight about social life in modern democratic societies, the threat of a 'tyranny of …prevailing opinion and feeling.' From J.S. Mill, *'On Liberty' and Other Writings*, (ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp.8-9) in Stephen K. White, 2009, p.17, note 24, p.117

support for them.' This framework will then be one we have chosen or freely affirmed, with its authority resting on the condition that 'we have *willed* it.'[556] Taylor's call to articulate our moral choices, White claims, has the effect of solidifying our belief by 'illuminating the ground of their truth.' Extending this metaphor, White interprets Taylor's model as 'being sustained or refreshed by the clearer water one finds by journeying up a stream, even if its ultimate source always remains out of reach.'[557] Taylor's is a process *mediated by language*, as we have seen. Because the process of meaning through language involves *constant creation*, full articulation is never attained, and our reaching for articulation becomes a kind of quest, similar to the one MacIntyre sees us humans as embarking on as we forge the story of our own life's narrative.[558] The lack of certainty about the possibility of attaining the final goal of our quest does not preclude a 'deepening of commitment', nor does it equate to viewing our own commitment as superior.

The *foundation model* entails the danger for ethical-political life of enhancing our conviction of truth, to the exclusion of 'the other', White concludes.[559] The *articulation model*, in contrast, honours what White calls '*the anxiety of finitude*', by conceiving human being as '*a continual traveler*' with a distinctive sort of disposition and consciousness. A *figuration of dignity* accompanies this model, and it is unreasonable for this human being to imagine itself in possession of the fullness of truth about its sources. The articulation model as developed by Taylor, in the context of a broad case for a kind of theism, *is* equally capable of engaging 'quietly and persistently' with finitude, especially as it is manifest in our character as language mediated beings. The embrace of the articulation model 'does not stack the deck against theism', in other words, as White is eager to establish.[560]

The virtues of *carefulness* and *humility* toward 'the other' are prefigured more clearly

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[556] Stephen K.White, 2009, p.19. Emphasis added

[557] *Ibid*

[558] White sees MacIntyre's account as a starker quest however, as he describes it in his note 32, where he finds Taylor drawing on some of MacIntyre's 'sense of human being' (White, Stephen K., 2009, p.118)

[559] White reminds us of the value of admitting to 'burdens of judgement', as Rawls' theory demands of a reasonable person who, being aware of the danger of exclusion, could distinguish from others, those 'reasonable comprehensive doctrines' that take account of pluralism. However, this is not a guarantee that the better judgement will bear upon our fellow citizens, as White himself recognises, as even the power of the normal burdens of judgements can be suspended, as his reference to Bush's post 9/11 'crusade' makes clear. (White, Stephen K., 2009, p.21)

[560] Stephen K. White, pp.22-23

as we reflect that meeting the next 'other' might lead us to a fuller understanding of our own sources. The journey the traveller undertakes is oriented by *reasonableness*, but is also 'crucially dependent on the insights of those she meets along the way for clues as to her ultimate destination.'[561] This travelling figure then takes on the character of a 'pilgrim' when he or she travels 'beyond the boundaries of her comfort zone, geographically, and culturally.' The issue is whether the construal of dignity around the portrait of the 'anxious but quietly committed traveler' coheres with central, late-modern insights, and whether it might be *more inclusive* than, say, the theistically based figurations. White seems to believe that the figure of this traveller, whose encounter with life persistently honours its *subjection to mortality*, does seem better able to include at least 'some theists as well as some nontheists.'[562]

Taylor's influence is evident too in the third site that White claims for *reasonableness* in his ethical model, and which involves the issue of *recognition*. The recognition that inheres in human beings as persons who possess dignity and are thus deserving of respect is one of the legacies of Enlightenment thinking. Over the last few decades, this has widened to the acknowledgement of people's diversity, their distinctiveness of language, religion, sexuality, nationality and traditional practices, though this *universalistic tendency* is still one of the most controversial subjects in contemporary political theory. The *construction of identity* stands in a mutually constitutive relationship at the ontological level, with the *construction of difference*, and the process of identity formation, as White observes, always already implicated in the *misrecognition* of the other.[563]

White then turns to William Connolly's work on these matters, drawing on the notion

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[561] *Ibid*, p.25

[562] *Ibid,* p.26. Taylor does not see the theistic-non-theistic, or belief and unbelief in opposing terms or rival theories, as we have seen. The focus of attention throughout this work is 'on the different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or the other.' Realising the difficulties of avoiding a confrontational stance in dealing with such controversial, and perhaps, 'unmodern' themes, Taylor hastens to add that 'we could say that these are alternative ways of living our moral/spiritual life, in the broadest sense.' (Taylor, C., 2007, pp.4-5, 11)

[563] Stephen K. White, 2009, pp.28-29. White observes the contradiction in Mill's belief in liberty with his infamous remarks about non-Western 'barbarians' who must be constrained by colonial powers to accept Western civilization. (White, Stephen K. 2009, p.30). One could attribute the mistaken belief in racial superiority held by European powers to the notion of the Chain of Being that placed 'civilised man' at the apex of creation, and that constructed other peoples as inferior, an attitude that to some extent prevailed well into the past century, and that periodically still tends to surface today, even in countries as diverse as Australia - we need only consider the construal of asylum seekers by the past government, during the Tampa incident, and the renewed unease and the alarming and almost xenophobic concern expressed by both of the major political parties with 'border protection.'

that identity requires difference in order to be, and that 'it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.'[564] The processes of pluralisation and globalisation exert pressures on the self to adhere to the elusive ideal of the sovereign, rational and responsible human being. A late-modern ethos would ask us to moderate our fear and hostility to diversity, or simply the frustrations that some of the excessive normalising expectations produce in us as we wrestle with these pressures. As he further elaborates this notion, White then examines the strategies of a number of contemporary philosophers whose efforts might be interpreted as different ways of portraying an ethos of '*presumptive generosity*' toward the other.[565]

The way to resolve the tension that a continuous receptiveness to the play of identity/difference can provoke and the temptation 'to transform difference into otherness' that it may originate is by cultivating an initial *generosity*, in 'a wilful, temporary suspension' of the engagement of our full, critical apparatus of practical judgment. The figure of '*the host*' responding in *affective* and *cognitive terms* to 'the approach of another to his door', is as central as White portrays it, to an 'enlarged sense of reasonableness' as is the figure of the traveller in the space of articulating sources. And yet, by itself, the ethos of 'the admirable host' construed in a sphere of *reasonable engagement*, may mask structures of power and privilege that can 'inconspicuously corrupt the scene of hospitality.' Thus the dynamic of identity recognition is always seen as operating against a background of social relations and structures that embodies claims about justice *and* injustice, all of which makes this third *sphere of reasonableness* 'constitutively entangled with the first.'[566]

Affirming subjectivity

Also following Connolly, White reasons that the fact that identity is constituted by difference does not in itself specify unlimited conflict as our political destiny, since people respond and resist in a variety of ways to pressures related to social categories of 'otherness, evil, or one of its surrogates' that can also be seen as manifestations of

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[564] From William Connolly, *Identity/Difference*: *Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox,* 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, pp.8-9 , cited in Stephen K. White, 2009, p.29, note 50, p.119
[565] Examples would include Connolly's 'critical responsiveness'; Butler's 'more capacious, generous and "unthreatened" bearings of the self'; Derrida's ' hospitality'; Romand Coles' 'receptive generosity'; and Patchen Markell's 'opening ourselves to the surprises' of engagement with the other. (White, Stephen K. 2009, p.31)
[566] Stephen K.White, 2009, pp.31-32

power.[567] Embracing an ontology of 'a rich and fugitive play of identity/difference' gives us a reason to resist such pressures, but for that reason to carry any force, we have to assume some sort of congruence between what we imagine and what our social world is like, attuned to our *deeper commitments* regarding *being*.[568] The '*disposition of presumptive generosity*' is the critical responsiveness that calls for a more generous and refined engagement with difference. Connolly calls it a kind of 'Augustinian imperative', in an orientation that is receptive to the critique of the modern, Western notion of subjectivity.[569]

Such a *tempered, agonistic figure of being* is complemented by the *figure of human dignity* which White draws from Charles Larmore; something akin to what Kant and Edmund Burke called the feeling of the sublime, arising when one confronts 'something grand, immense, grave, potentially threatening, or painful.' Kant saw human beings as free and rational creatures of the 'noumenal' world, qualities that elevated humans above all others.[570] Larmore focuses instead on what makes humans natural wonders of *this* world; namely, their 'capacity for working out a coherent view of the world.'[571] Drawing on Larmore's definition, White presents his own concept of the nature of the '*capacious subject*' and its dignity:

We are grand because we are capacious: we reason freely and bring new order into the world. It is before the dignity of this being that we are moved to show respect. And it is this movement that holds in check the temptation/pressure to react with hostility toward the other, and thus accommodate persistent, deep difference, which, in turn, is crucial to our progress toward agreement about the basics of a just society.[572]

And yet White believes that a just society will be more likely to maintain its sense of

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[567] As one would expect, Taylor also sees Connolly formulating an aspect of Foucault, with the former's understanding of 'the way in which high ethical and spiritual ideals are often interwoven with exclusions and relations of domination.' (Taylor, Charles, 1989, p.518) We could similarly recall Kahn's observations of the effects of exclusion and inclusion in his analysis of discourses of modernity.

[568] Stephen K. White, 2009, pp.41-42

[569] William Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, Calif., 1993, p.141, in Stephen K White, 2009, p.42, note 20, p.120.

[570] This notion of elevation, as White observes, is of course more commonly associated with an intuition of God, or the divine, and has taken diverse forms in the West, in the philosophy of Locke as much as in Eleanor Roosevelt, who had a central role in the writing of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, no doubt animated by her view of human beings elevated by the gift of a divine 'spark.' (White, Stephen K., 2009, p.45)

[571] From Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, pp.62-63, cited in Stephen K. White., 2009, p.45; note 27, p.121

[572] Stephen K. White, 2009, p.45

justice over time if the reproduction of its structures is mediated by a late-modern ethos with a 'somewhat thicker moral core and a greater attention to agonism' than is the case in Larmore's account. Connolly's 'presumptive generosity' goes a long way towards supporting the moral code that White sees necessary, but there is a danger, when stressing the capaciousness of human beings to work out a coherent view of life, that dignity may be reduced to the potential for a kind of mastery. White thus redefines capaciousness as 'the *meaning making* of a *meaning-seeking* creature', focussing on *ordinary language* and the *articulation* of ontological sources. This emphasises the sense that we can master much in the world, but that such projections always remain arrayed before a background of remaining inarticulacy.[573]

Such sense of limited inarticulacy, reflecting our being in ordinary language, also reflects our limitations as mortals, since the core of our character as 'meaning-seeking' creatures arises from the consciousness of our finitude, our mortality. Our *subjection to mortality* has an impact on our understanding of human dignity too. The question then arises of how well the familiar figure of the *autonomous* or *capacious subject* engages with the issues of agonism, identity recognition, and difference, as this tradition envisions itself beyond the borders of the nation-state. The liberal constellation of *dignity, equality and respect* arrayed around the modern subject's *autonomous agency* is felicitous, White believes, because of an '*unacknowledged theism*' that haunts its basic assumptions, and this is a reason for also including this position with regard to these issues.[574]

White tries to provide a sense of how the non-theist can find the source of the authority that makes each agent restrain his or her behaviour towards others, while preserving the ontological portrait of 'connectedness of agents' that Taylor sees as arising from the individual human affirmation mediated by *agape*, or divine love. We need to vivify the consciousness of our 'subjection to mortality' to satisfy the attentiveness criterion in the space of the moral imagination of distant others. But because the non-theistic liberal tradition underlies the dignity of the human around the figure of the capacious agent, any talk of orienting the ontological figure of human being more around its subjection to mortality is likely to be perceived by such

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[573] *Ibid*, pp.46-51 573
[574] *Ibid*, p.54

tradition as 'a deeply threatening gesture.' White nevertheless takes this question of imbalance seriously, but without making theism the only option.[575]

The capacious subject's agency, White proposes, can take shape from 'two ontological sources around which we figure dignity.' This means thinking in terms of both the capacities and powers displayed by a human being, *and* its 'access to the fact of its mortality.' White once more draws 'heavily', in his own words, upon Taylor's account of *practical reason* that calls upon our skills of interpretation and judgement to engage with new situations, and progressively articulate our underlying moral sources. With this approach, White believes that 'something may function like Taylor's sources' but be 'more amorphous in terms of potential moral guidance.'[576] Thus, our intense dread of mortality comes to be viewed more as a burden under which we continually struggle, as we seek a mode of awareness of that struggle as 'a countervailing force to the momentum we draw from our sense of ourselves as capacious agents.' We will then live in a way that *balances* these two sources: it is only by grappling attentively and persistently with the question of how we should live with the *consciousness of a world without foundations* that 'we bear witness to the terms of our existence and thereby display the peculiar, basic dignity of which only humans are capable.' We thus need a response that is as 'persistently effective' in *vivifying our sense of finitude* as 'all the routines and diversions of affluent, modern life' are in directing our attention away from it.[577]

Such a response is rather like Connolly's figuration of *being* as a continual, never fully manageable, '*fugitive becoming*' or '*presencing*.' This ontological figuration vividly portrays the *finitude* of all projections of identity. But it is the distinctive role that the *consciousness of mortality* can play, persistently interrupting that 'smooth imaginary of a sovereign self who continually sees itself as one step ahead of the constitutive entanglement of 'identity/difference' that trumps the self-image of untrammelled capaciousness. As Judith Butler reminds us, White adds, we are always already 'thrown into the subject of mortality' through our relation to others, regardless of our own will.[578]

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[575] Stephen K. White, 2009, pp.64-65
[576] *Ibid*, pp.65-66
[577] *Ibid*, pp.66-67
[578] *Ibid*, pp.68-69

A distinctive *sense of human connectedness* can also be drawn out of this notion of subjection to mortality that could function in a way that is analogous to the connectedness embodied in Taylor's notion of *agape*. When the sense of the basic equality of human beings takes its shape neither from God nor from pure agency, as in the model White elaborates, 'it offers a foothold for a subtle sense of community.' The vivification of *a sense of common humanity* or *solidarity* arises through a cultivation of the 'experience of common subjection', rather than through a recognition that we posses the same capacities or powers. The experiential context of a shared constitutive burden, the burden of mortality, coaxes our imagination into feeling 'that most slender, initial bond of commonality across large geographical and cultural distances.'[579]

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The notion of a late-modern ethos may not, as White admits, be all that is needed to address the predicament of democracy that confronts us all as we move into the future. The wealth of philosophical perspectives that White draws on is a product of a period of significant historical upheavals, and he does a splendid job, as has Taylor, of illuminating the broad context and directions in which ideas about ourselves, our 'human nature' and the world we live in have developed. White's contribution pays homage to Taylor, while differentiating itself from the theistic approach of the latter. His distinctive way of thinking about human dignity, like Taylor's, involves interpreting our unique status as 'creatures that seek and make meaning,'[580] and whose capacity for language enables us to do this. We humans seek meaning because we are conscious of our finitude; our common subjection to our mortality illuminates our human condition, and from this weak ontological realisation, we begin to imagine the solidarity of all humanity.

White, like Taylor, is also concerned with the notion of inequality and meaning making, as he recalls how, since the ancient Greeks thought about the free shaping of public meaning, people realise that *the good life* is negatively influenced by material deprivation. In his orientation to dignity, there is an appeal to *justice* as he would

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[579] *Ibid*, p.75
[580] *Ibid*, p.91

rather see a democratic ethos animated by a sense of dignity in which the 'burden of proof' would fall more 'naturally and heavily' on those who support a status quo 'tolerant of massive inequality than is the case at present.'[581]

In the portrait of a self as the ontological figure that both White and Taylor have put forward, capable of facing the challenges and tensions of our late-modernity, we find Taylor's ethos, unlike White's, rooted in the notion of *agape* and, in a shift that is a central component of our Western, modern identity. This is a significant turn marked in our own narrative, the story of our 'human nature', which sees Christianity, as a result of the Protestant Reformation, more consistently engaged with the lives of ordinary believers. White thinks that while the notion of agape has 'something utterly overwhelming about it', at least when transferred to an expectation placed on humans, the imperfections of the human character may make it 'too decrepit a vehicle to manifest that love in full and robust form.' It is in this spirit that White puts forward the suggestion that *a non-theistic, presumptive generosity* of the kind he has elaborated might be found to 'overlap rather interestingly with a religious orientation that manifests an attenuated agape.'[582]

White's reinterpretation of the figure of *dignity* also allows for a similar reinterpretation regarding the question of *inequality across species*, which in fact topples humans from their traditional pre-eminence in the order of being. This works by exposing human constructions that are also carriers of power or domination, in a way that effectively blurs the human/non human divide. Once this blurring occurs, we are inclined to agree with White's suggestion, that perhaps we can allow humans some 'modest' priority, as we are at the same time called upon to imagine ourselves more as '*shepherds of being*', rather than 'masters of the rest of nature.'[583]

The manner in which White has conceived of human being, as creatures on a journey, is also closer to the Aristotelian notion of *flourishing*, dependent for an individual on taking action in public life, even if for the modern self this has to have a more subtle, but not insignificant pull. We thus continue to travel on our *poietic* journey, in a

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[581] *Ibid*, p.92
[582] *Ibid*, p.109
[583] *Ibid*, p.93

process of *discovery* and *creation*, always in the knowledge that our goal will be partially shared and partially contested by others. White sees the traveller in this journey accompanied by a 'chastened reason' which, while 'still empathic', also makes the traveller deeply aware of the various twentieth-century critiques of reason itself.[584]

As we engage in this process, articulating what we understand is fundamental to our 'human nature', using our rationality and our language capacity, we affirm and continue to give shape to our deepest commitments, in a *presencing* or *becoming*, a kind of bearing witness to, and thus honouring, *the character of being*. The aspect of receptive generosity in White's model encourages us to cultivate a sensibility that sees individuals, families and ways of life, not just collective types. And, importantly, it opens the way to revive democracy in the structures of society in which we all find ourselves entangled in our late modernity.

In this regard, White also echoes Timothy Chappell's concern, central to our earlier introduction on ethics and morality, to elaborate an '*ethical outlook*' to enable us to live a genuinely worthwhile and fully human life. Such a notion resonates with White, as much as with Taylor, Osborne, Smith, and the other critics reviewed in this chapter, as it involves questions of what *we ultimately value*; living, that is, according to a *rational set of views* and *deep commitments* that are sincerely and passionately held.

As we come close to rounding off the story of the *poiesis* of our 'human nature', we find that one of the most thoughtful approaches to the question of the sources of our self and *the goods* that we hold dear has been that of Charles Taylor. The pattern of discussion in this chapter has provided a further opportunity to review and expand Taylor's masterly account of the making of our modern identity, and also of the concerns that arise from his philosophy, as some of his critics have addressed them. It has also served as a kind of tribute to what we can see as Taylor's own inspiring *poiesis*, as this thesis extends some of the concerns so far discussed further in its last chapter, from quite a different, if complementary, perspective.

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[584] *Ibid*, p.107

The views examined in this chapter could equally be seen as exemplars for the reconstruction of the 'project of modernity', in one way or another, in an effort to preserve what is most valuable of the post-Kantian legacy. In all of the writers reviewed there is a clear determination to reconfigure the Kantian proclamation of the self's dignity, freedom, and rationality, and a cautious endorsement of the value of *affirming* these principles, or goods, enmeshed as they are with *our sense of morality* and *inter-subjectivity*, reframed and enshrined in theories of human rights, justice and democracy.

A debate that began some time around the middle of the nineteenth century, dividing in many respects the sciences and the humanities, will occupy us next. That it continues to both separate and unite a wide range of thinkers in both domains is in itself testimony to the importance we still attach to these matters. The discussion that follows next will retain the focus on the 'nature' of our '*human nature*', but it will also complement it and extend it with an examination of some of the most relevant scientific perspectives about ourselves, our evolutionary past, and our place in the world. This hitherto unexplored strand in our *poietic* account can thus be seen to continue and also to further our understandings of the 'capacious' rational subject and its potential, its agency and proclivity to lead a fully ethical and fulfilling existence.

Chapter Six

Self and morality in a holistic vision of human evolution and culture

Reality is under constant review. Twenty-three centuries ago, Aristotle believed that the heart must be the source of mental life because of its dynamic action and its warmth. The function of the brain, he thought, was to cool the blood. He built his cosmology on the belief that the Earth stands motionless at the centre of the universe, a fixed point about which the sun and the moon and the stars revolve. Aristotle was wrong on every count, but his erroneous beliefs – the product of intuition and illusion – served him well enough. And though we now know immeasurably more than Aristotle about the workings of the human body and the structure of the cosmos, we should not delude ourselves by thinking that we have arrived at some privileged end-point of intellectual evolution.[585]

(Paul Broks, 2003)

There is really no more ground for supposing that all our demands can be accounted for by one universal underlying kind of motive than there is ground for supposing that all physical phenomena are cases of a single law. The elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those of physics are. The various ideals have no common character apart from the fact that they are ideals.[586]

(William James)

Introduction

The Aristotelian conception that enjoins us to live *the good life* has remarkably endured, albeit in different forms, in the lives of countless generations of humans. This conception is part of the *poiesis* that this thesis has been tracing, as it followed the various interpretations that this concept has given rise to, from the time the classical precepts gave way to further explorations of our selfhood and our 'human nature' and to later concerns to understand *human reason* and the origins and motivations that underpin *human morality*.

The question of *how* to achieve human happiness, or *eudaimonia*, is still nevertheless inextricably linked to the idea of *who* we are, or take ourselves to be. The manner in which we conceive ourselves as individual persons, with rights, commitments and social obligations, has once again taken centre stage in the theories of human

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[585] Paul Broks, 2003, *Into the Silent Land: Travels in Neuropsychology*, Atlantic Books, London, pp.20-21
[586] From William James, 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life', quoted in Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, *Experiments in Ethics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England), p.121

rationality and morality that have emerged from the more scientific approaches to knowledge that began to spread towards the end of the nineteenth century. The import and continued influence of the 'new sciences' on these matters on contemporary philosophy and on most branches of the humanities is the subject of the discussion in this chapter, as it aims to further the conception of our 'human nature', exploring the ways in which perspectives from both the scientific and the humanistic domains can be seen as complementary, and ultimately enhanced, in an open and fruitful convergence.

A great deal of the knowledge we have gained about ourselves and the world we live in, as scientific and technological advances spill into everyday life, is now under closer scrutiny and revision. This presents us with new moral and intellectual dilemmas that challenge our intuition and our common understandings. Our exploration in this thesis has followed some of the main paths that have shaped these current understandings. This final gathering together now seeks to suggest that the journey must continue, that the exploration of the different aspects of the one world we all inhabit, in the ongoing and richly evolving *poiesis* of our 'human nature', has also benefited from the biological knowledge we have accumulated about ourselves, as it too continues to merge into the social and the cultural ways in which we have come to view ourselves in the Western, contemporary world. The encounter between the *biological* and the *cultural*, the manner in which both ground our rational, intellectual and deeply *social nature*, need not be antagonistic, but rather taken as an opportunity for advancing the dialogue of discovery and mutual understanding of our own selfhood, our culture and our morality.

But before completing the picture of what we can regard as an ongoing aspiration for self-realisation and autonomy in the light of the more recent empirical findings on our 'human nature', we have to recall the discussion, at the beginning of our narrative, that centred on the difference between what we understand as *morality*, as a social, or cultural system that guides and constrains human behaviour, and our own *ethical outlook* as individual selves, or persons with a specific identity. Part of this discussion has already been developed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, where we examined the different ways in which we, at various times in our historical development, have framed our personal and societal value systems. The question of

what set of values seems to best justify our choices when we are called upon to act, and how to use our judgement in making those choices is what underlies most of the moral systems humans have devised in the West. This chapter continues the attempt to distinguish between *morality* as encoded in the systems that we have elaborated as products of our cultural conceptions, and *ethics*, or more precisely, the personal *ethical stance* that allows us to realise and successfully negotiate the complexity of our 'human nature', while honouring its potential and rich endowments.

The array of moral systems elaborated in the history of Western civilisation makes it virtually impossible to settle on any one in particular, on any one set of norms for evaluating human conduct. Our parallel exploration of the concept of *an ethical self*, on the other hand, has made more visible the premise that we also sought to develop at the beginning of this thesis. This is the fact that what we should be more concerned about is *not* how morality can be explained in terms of the efficacy of any given system that is presented as universal and applicable at all times and places. Our focus should be rather on what we, as *rational* and *feeling creatures* perceive as that which can best honour our uniqueness as human beings, our own conception of ourselves and what we understand about other equally sentient beings. The full meaning of this statement will hopefully emerge in the course of our discussion in the next few pages.

All human action is conceptually shaped, because when we act intentionally there is, as Anthony Appiah puts it, *something that we think we are doing*. Human behavioural possibilities are the result, in part, of the concepts that are available to people and that constitute a central dimension of *culture*. What matters for our ethical lives is 'which *psychological mechanisms* we have', and the *cultural context* that determines our behavioural possibilities, our *individual natures*.[587] There is only one world, the world we humans inhabit, but this world admits of more than one description. We can gain insight into the profoundly variegated nature of our evaluations, as we take in the two Kantian standpoints of the world of our senses, the *Sinnenwelt*, and the world of our understanding, where reason prevails, the *Veerstandeswelt*. We can also make our descriptions of the world and of our 'human nature' richer and further our understanding if we take in a different perspective, a new vision, where *naturalism*, or

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[587] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, 'The Varieties of Moral Experience', *Experiments in Ethics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England), pp.125-6. Emphases added

rather the knowledge that has more recently flowed from the natural sciences, is seen as pertinent to moral enquiry.

Some versions of naturalism may in the end deny the autonomy of ethics, at least in its stronger forms, but as Appiah suggests, the exploration of value that our moral enquiry is concerned with, or rather of *what we value*, as Timothy Chappell has defined it, *the ethical stance* that we should perhaps consider adopting, is one that - in the name of the moral sciences - 'would remove the wedge' between 'moral' and 'science.' This new vision, as Appiah describes it, also insists that 'the relation between moral inquiry and some new empirical discovery should remain an open question.'[588] More recently, experimental moral psychology, drawing from the work of primatologists, evolutionary game theorists, anthropologists, and economists, have posited separate mechanisms that produce our various 'moral sentiments.' In the belief that the work from these and other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology and neuroscience, can equally contribute to a further understanding of the nature of *human rationality and morality*, we will also take a look at some of their discoveries and the picture they present.

Our present discussion thus stems from the premise that the modern evolutionary understandings of our biological makeup need not diminish the significance of our mind's capacities, the importance of our cultural traditions, or the force of our moral commitments. We continue to struggle for meaning and purpose, as *rational*, *cultural beings* but also *deeply social animals*, rooted in our *biology*, shaping and being shaped by our *history, culture and society*. We seek our self-realisation as conscious and ethical beings acting in our contemporary world, but we understand that this entails more than our own personal goals; it involves enabling the conditions for the flourishing and self-realisation of *all* sentient beings on our planet. It is only within this holistic, integrated vision that a self can emerge who encourages and values dignity, equality and justice for all creatures, human and non-human, and one with whom we may also fully identify.

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[588] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, 'The Ends of Ethics', *Experiments in Ethics*, p.185

6.1   Of different understandings and common aspirations

The preceding chapter discussed at some length the ways in which we human beings have extended our conceptual understandings of morality while we orient our capacities to the creation of a more enduring, contemporary *ethos* that will enable us to honour not only our human aspirations, but to also extend this *ethical outlook* to everything that surrounds us, including other sentient beings in our own immediate environment, and even beyond. If there is anything we can conclude from this summary review of our 'human nature', as it has been understood throughout our Western history, it is that there is *no one* moral system that has so far presented itself as an ideal candidate for universal endorsement, even assuming that this were possible or in fact desirable.

Reflecting on what it would mean to live according to such an ethos, our narrative now turns to what would seem a more enduring and perhaps more meaningful way of conceiving these matters. This involves the ethical question of making a life for ourselves. Because this important premise recognises that everybody has a life to make and that we are making our lives together, we are bound to take 'morality' – our obligations to others – seriously too. As Anthony Appiah puts it, 'it's precisely our recognition that each other person is engaged in *the ethical project of making a life* that reveals to us our obligations to them.' And we can then hold that our having a life to make is what *our humanity* consists in, and in *recognising* and *valuing* our own humanity, we are bound similarly to recognise and value the humanity that we find in others.[589]

In a kind of continuum of our initial impulse, some contemporary approaches in the natural sciences that investigate the origins of our reasoning and our moral intuitions, and which may contribute to a fuller understanding of our 'human nature' are presented in the pages that follow. This chapter can therefore be seen to take forward the idea of scientific enlightenment that Osborne proposed, and particularly the conviction that those eighteenth century philosophers like Condorcet and Diderot, also scientists in their own right, so passionately held about the role of science in an

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[589] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, 'The Ends of Ethics', *Experiments in Ethics*, pp.202-3

understanding of 'human nature.' Their passion was to lead to an unquestioned view of progress that pervaded all aspects of society, and this is the view that we find prevailing at the time of the Darwinian revolution. What followed from such assumptions is also one of the reasons for the intense reactions that caused the rift between the sciences and the humanities since, with different interpretations of what the notion of 'progress', biological or cultural, could possibly mean, who it could or should benefit, and how or whether it could be attained at all.

The naturalistic thinking that flourished since Darwin, strengthened in its modern guise by the ongoing scientific investigations that seek to explain our biological origins, as well as our mental endowments and cultural development, has been gradually building a more coherent picture of our complex 'human nature.' Many contemporary findings have been shown to vindicate the tradition of rationality that Kant, Hume and many other thinkers developed, while more recent empirical studies continue to inquire into what Shaftesbury and Hutcheson saw as the 'moral sense' underlying human behaviour and moral agency. Some of the more salient theories and debates around these issues are examined in the pages that follow, seen also as an opportunity to advocate a wider interdisciplinary approach, an open 'conversation' that can lead us to better understandings of our human complexity, and one that does not lose sight of the kind of ethical quest for meaning and purpose that the likes of Osborne, White, and Taylor, as more recent representatives of this long Western humanistic tradition, continue to uphold as central to the full realisation of our selves in the world we all share and inhabit.[590]

Kant acknowledged that we are natural beings, belonging to the world of *the senses*, or *Sinnenwelt.* But he also thought that in order for us to be fully free agents, we need to make use of our *reason* in our conduct, which situates humans in the world of the understanding, the *Verstandeswelt*. Social science has sponsored various strains in our traditions of philosophical ethics, even if, according to Anthony Appiah, some of its

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[590] Kwame Anthony Appiah's 2008 contribution, *Experiments in Ethics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England) is one of the latest in this time-honoured tradition. Another way of understanding the transformations of thought from classical antiquity to the way we now experience ourselves in the world is also summed up by Martin Jay's *Songs of Experience*, whose subtitle appropriately conveys the continuity and appeal of these endeavours in the intellectual humanistic traditions of the Western world. (Martin Jay, 2006, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London).

claims have a certain 'reductionist torque.' This thesis takes a perspective very much in line with Appiah's belief that 'we can couple these realms without reducing one to the other.' The process, nevertheless, is not without its complications. Evolutionary arguments, which Appiah, as well as some of the other thinkers in this chapter, thoughtfully explore, take the standpoint of the *Sinnenwelt*. Among these, evolutionary psychology, like all Darwinian theory, aims to explain how the characteristics of organisms arose by natural selection in their ancestors' environments. What is distinctive about this particular discipline, however, is a focus on the adaptation of *behaviour*. Historically though, arguments that root patterns of social life in biology have sometimes been enlisted to rationalise an inequitable status quo, and this is one of the reasons to regard evolutionary hypotheses with scepticism, until they are tested against evidence from anthropology and history about the full range of human variability.[591]

Although we have lived in the 'Age of Science', marked by the publication of Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* in 1632, it seems that ever since, as Robin Dunbar points out, we have viewed the 'ever-rising tide of science' with an ambivalence tinged with a growing sense of alienation, of no longer being in control of our destinies. In Dunbar's account, the 'trouble with science' was born of these doubts, for Galileo's legacy 'spawned divided loyalties.'[592] Dunbar does not deny that there are 'serious moral questions' to be answered about our use and abuse of science, but he also believes that we need to distinguish very carefully between questions 'about science' and questions about the exploitation of scientific knowledge.[593] The undercurrents of conflict between science and anti-science are very real, as Dunbar demonstrates throughout his book, and the resolution of this conflict, he argues, will have far-reaching consequences not just for the way we live, but also for our future political organisations, perhaps even for our survival as a species.[594]

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[591] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2008, 'The Varieties of Moral Experience', *Experiments in Ethics,* pp.123-4
[592] Robin Dunbar, 1995, 'Introduction', *The Trouble with Science,* Faber and Faber Limited, London, p.1. Dunbar, a well-known British anthropologist, has continued to promote an understanding of scientific thought in his work.
[593] This echoes Osborne's examination of Latour's notions about science too, as we have seen, with the spectre of 'scientism' raised by the latter, and Osborne's distinction between this and the ethos that underlies scientific research and practice.
[594] *Ibid*, p.11. There is no denying that scientific discoveries have been used, and abused, for either the benefit or to the detriment of humankind. But at the same time, we cannot underestimate the benefits of some of the advances made by science, the obvious being the eradication of many previously incurable diseases, a reduction in infant

Some proposals for mutual collaboration

Various possibilities have arisen from time to time to ensure the continuity of the collaboration that began to develop with the arrival of the new sciences in the eighteenth century. A proposal that has gathered lavish praise and trenchant criticism in equal amounts is Edward O. Wilson's vision of 'consilience'; the desirability that all knowledge be shared to better understand the human condition.[595] The central idea of the 'consilience world view' as Wilson describes it, is:

…that all tangible phenomena, from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics. In support of this idea is the conclusion of biologists that humanity is kin to all other life forms by common descent.[596]

Tracing human ancestry to the point origin in Africa about two hundred thousand years ago, Wilson sees the evolution of culture in humans as profoundly affected by 'our hereditary human nature.' While depicting his vision, Wilson displays his humanistic concerns and his profound knowledge and understanding of history. His own intellectual formation led him to discover biology and natural history, inspiring in him a deep conviction that the world is orderly and 'can be explained by a small number of natural laws.'[597]

Equating his search for consilience among the branches of learning to following 'Ariadne's Thread backward through the Cretan labyrinth,' Wilson sees Theseus as humanity and the Minotaur as a symbol of 'our own dangerous irrationality.' In this image, the labyrinth contains all knowledge, and physics is near the entrance,

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mortality and an increased life-span for most human beings, even in the developing nations of the world. There have been benefits too, even as the unintended products of its darker technological applications. The economic and political pressures of war, to name recent examples from World War II, resulted in the development of immunology as a science and of plastic surgery, as well as radar, rocketry and jet engines, not to mention computers, and the world-wide web. The space race, and the large sums of money originally invested by the US and Soviet governments, has resulted in unprecedented advances, such as increasingly sophisticated technologies that now control entire satellite navigation and transport systems, as well as the robotic probes that continue to seek to unravel the 'dark abyss of time' and our cosmic origins, while their counterpart in nanotechnology are now able to literally sail along our own bloodstream, seeking malignancies in the human body, including the brain, and infusing life-saving therapies.

[595] Edward O. Wilson, 1999, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., New York. This book was originally published in 1998.
[596] *Ibid*, 'To What End?', pp.292-3
[597] *Ibid*, 'The Ionian Enchantment', pp.4-5

comprising one gallery. Like a Borgesian maze, the labyrinth of the real world is one of 'almost infinite possibility.' We can never map it all, but we can try and connect threads, from the specific back to the general, tracing pathways into broadening webs of explanation through the branching points of causation, all the way back to the laws of physics. The opposite journey, 'from physics to end points, is extremely problematic' because as the distance away from physics increases, the options allowed by the antecedent disciplines increase exponentially, with each branching point of causal explanation multiplying the forward-bound threads. Biology, Wilson continues, 'is almost unimaginably more complex than physics, and the arts equivalently more complex than biology.'[598]

Environmental policy, social science, ethics and biology, are the branches of knowledge where all the discipline specialists can potentially reach agreement on a common body of abstract principles and evidentiary proof. In this convergence, the 'intellectual synthesis' that would result, philosophy has a vital role. There has never been a better time for collaboration between scientists and philosophers, Wilson believes, especially where they meet 'in the borderlands between biology, the social sciences, and the humanities.'[599]

As to the question of what form the 'union between the social and natural sciences' might take, Wilson suggests that the discipline that affords the wider perspective is the one that 'examines the biological basis of social behavior in all kinds of organisms.' Anticipating some of his critics, he explains further:

I know that the very idea of a biological influence on human behavior in particular has been controversial, especially in the political arena, but consider this. Human beings may be unique in degree of behavioral plasticity, and they may be alone in the possession of language, self-awareness, and foresightedness, but all of the known human systems taken together form only a small subset of those displayed by the thousands of living species of highly social insects and vertebrates. If we hope to create a true science of social behavior, we will need to trace the divergent evolution of these groups of organisms, through a time scale of hundreds of millions of years. It is also useful to recognize that human social behavior originated ultimately through biological evolution.[600]

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[598] *Ibid*, 'Ariadne's Thread', pp.73-4
[599] *Ibid*, pp.11-14
[600] *Ibid*, 'The Social Sciences', p.208

As early as 1989, John Searle identified a 'radical discontinuity' between the natural sciences and the social sciences,[601] stating that there are no 'bridge principles' between phenomena identified by the laws of physics and those described by the social sciences. Wilson sees what needs to be bridged as 'a sprinkling of charted terrain separated by blank expanses that are of unknown extent yet accessible to coherent interdisciplinary research.' His proposal is 'a sketch of the blank spaces', where the gaps of greatest potential include no less than 'the final unification of physics, the reconstruction of living cells, the assembly of ecosystems, the coevolution of genes and culture, the physical basis of mind, and the deep origins of ethics and religion.'[602]

It is clear that Wilson presented his grand vision in a spirit of genuine enthusiasm, even though the core of his proposal can be seen as somewhat politically naïve. His theory remains controversial chiefly because it purports to encompass within the confines of one chosen discipline all the others.[603] The reaction against this 'reductionism' was to be expected, as the question arises of what systematic methodology can possibly recommend itself for this enterprise, since the impossibility of devising a paradigm that has validity for all concerned is undoubtedly problematic. It is equally difficult to imagine too how agreement on shared paradigms, or intellectual 'niches', can be reached.

The idea that human social behaviour has its origins in biological evolution should not by itself be that contentious these days. However, to presume, as Wilson has been interpreted, that *all* human social behaviour can be explained with reference to evolution is what has turned many social scientists against his proposal.

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[601] John Searle, 1989, 'Prospects for the Social Sciences', in *Minds, Brains and Science: The 1984 Reith Lectures*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England pp.71-85

[602] Edward O. Wilson, 1999, 'To What End?', *Consilience*, p.293

[603] A cursory look at some of the reviewers of Wilson's book at the time of publication point to this and other objections, even those made by its more favourably-disposed critics. A small sample of the variety of responses from different fields are those posted by Kenan Malik, (*Independent on Sunday*, 30 August, 1998); historian Charles Gillispie ('E.O. Wilson's *Consilience*: A Noble, Unifying Vision, Grandly Expressed', *American Scientist*, May-June, 1998, Volume 86, Number 3, p.1); Alec A. Schaerer' review in the *Journal of Bioeconomics* 1:1999, pp.327-32; Anthony Campbell's 1998 review (acampbell.ukfsn.org); and the rather caustic 'Look!', by philosopher Jerry Fodor, an article appearing in the *London Review of Books,* Vol.20, No.21, 29 October 1998, pp.3-6, shortly after Wilson's publication, which contrasts with the more measured review by another equally reputable philosopher, Michael Ruse, in *The Global Spiral* (a publication of Metanexus Institute; article published on 16.03.1999).

Wilson is nevertheless optimistic about the prospects of convergence, as he sees the natural sciences already drawing closer to the social sciences in the past few decades, with 'four bridges across the divide' already in place:

The first is cognitive neuroscience, or the brain sciences, with elements of cognitive psychology, whose practitioners analyze the physical basis of mental activity and aim to solve the mystery of conscious thought. The second is human behavioral genetics, now in the early stages of teasing apart the hereditary basis of the process, including the biasing influence of the genes on mental development. The third bridging discipline is evolutionary biology, including the hybrid offspring sociobiology, whose researchers have set out to explain the hereditary origins of social behavior. The fourth is the environmental sciences. The connection of the last field to social theory may at first seem tenuous, but is not. The natural environment is the theater in which the human species evolved and to which its physiology and behavior are finely adapted. Neither human biology nor the social sciences can make full sense until their world views take account of that unyielding framework.[604]

The ability to achieve this ambitious synthesis, the 'scientific humanism' that Wilson calls for, depends on our wisdom and our capacity to make choices that also include humankind's 'environmental ethic.'[605] This environmental concern is perhaps what has commanded most respect and admiration for Wilson, and where he has concentrated most of his effort in recent years, as his involvement in campaigns to save the rainforests and his general work on biodiversity and conservation show. The human impact on our planet's environment is explored in Wilson's *The Diversity of Life*, where his arguments for the valuing of the world's biodiversity are as passionate as they are persuasive.[606]

Jerry Fodor has criticised Wilson's vision of consilience for claiming that '[A]ll the facts that there are, including all the facts that there are about minds, "supervene on" the facts of basic physics.'[607] It has also been labelled deterministic, and Michael Ruse originally objected to its indeterminacy in Wilson's discussion of free will.[608] Charles Gillispie, who calls Wilson's vision 'a grand prophecy beautifully expressed', similarly finds a point of weakness in his 'attempt to rescue free will from the overall

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[604] *Ibid*, pp.208-9
[605] *Ibid,* p.304
[606] Edward O. Wilson, 1992, *The Diversity of Life*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Ringwood, Victoria
[607] Jerry Fodor, 1998, 'Look!', *London Review of Books*, Vol.20, No.21, 29 October 1998, p.3
[608] Michael Ruse, 1999, 'Review of E.O. Wilson's "Consilience"', *The Global Spiral*, Metanexos Institute, Philadelphia, PA., USA, 16.03.1999

determinism of biological necessity.'[609] These are all points worth considering, and this chapter takes them up in various ways in the sections that follow, where the focus will be on what, or how much, we can learn about human behaviour, ethics and morality from this and similar ideas. However, the fact is that a proposal for convergence, unity among disciplines, true collaboration, or 'consilience' that has the scope and ambition that Wilson's vision encompasses may just be the best that we have so far envisaged to test our ingenuity and good will.

Wilson's proposal has a distinguished lineage, and we thus find a similar plea for unity in Jerome Kagan's recent work[610] for example, which expands on the reflection on the academy that C.P. Snow delivered in 1959.[611] In it, Kagan looks at the barriers that prevent the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities from collaborating with one another, and suggests that a better understanding could be partially achieved through collaboration in the academy, with courses co-taught and books co-authored by representatives from two or all three groups. The same approach could be taken towards some research projects, and in community education at large. [612]

Another persuasive and thoughtful attempt to bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities is Owen Flanagan's naturalistic philosophy of 'human nature', which combines ideas from the main philosophic and scientific traditions in the West. This is a philosophy that is compatible with the best understandings of the 'scientific image' and that retains what is 'beautiful, true, and inspiring in the humanistic image.' Underlying it is the belief that 'the project to live morally and meaningfully expresses

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[609] Charles Gillispie, 1998, 'E.O. Wilson's *Consilience*: A Noble, Unifying Vision, Grandly Expressed', *American Scientist*, May-June, 1998, Volume 86, Number 3, p.1

[610] Jerome Kagan, 2009, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the 21st Century: Revisiting C.P. Snow,* Cambridge University Press, New York

[611] Snow's famous Bede Lecture, 'The Two Cultures', delivered in Cambridge University, subsequently published as a book, was based on the premise that intellectual life was divided into the arts and the humanities on one side and the natural sciences on the other, and Kagan recalls how its brash dismissal of the humanities as an intellectual mission lacking in rigour and unable to contribute to the welfare of those living in economically underdeveloped regions provoked heated discussion, including F.R. Leavis' rebuttal three years later, in the same institution. At the time, Snow alleged that world peace and prosperity would profit from training more scientists and engineers and fewer historians, philosophers and literary critics, which did not endear him to anyone working in those areas.

[612] Kagan cites the example of a member of the applied sciences faculty at Harvard who made a passionate plea to scientists, humanists, and artists to 'break out of the cocoons of premises that separate them', which resulted in an undergraduate offering where such collaboration between a social scientist, a natural scientist and a historian took place. (Jerome Kagan, 2009, p.266)

our most noble aspiration.'[613]

A false picture of our human complexity has often been based on a mistaken understanding of both the sciences and of the humanities in the Western world. An image of self-creation, the 'humanistic image' is based on the exercise of our free will, often accompanied by promises of eternal reward for a life lived well. This idea, particularly in its theistic implications, Flanagan finds 'extremely implausible, excessively flattering, and self-serving.'[614] The scientific image, from the humanistic perspective, is often dehumanising, draining life of meaning, as Weber's disparaging dismissal of the natural science in the remark quoted in the previous chapter shows. Humanists tend to see science as reductive and materialistic, offering no resources to help us find our way 'in the high-stakes drama that is life.' For them, the natural sciences have nothing to say about our full nature and place in the cosmos, and the scientific image appears to lack depth and wisdom.[615]

And yet, the two apparently irreconcilable images share a concern with what it means to be a person, 'a being possessed of consciousness, with capacities for self-knowledge and the ability to live rationally, morally, and meaningfully.'[616] Flanagan's definition of human beings and his scientifically inspired philosophy encourages ethics and the quest for meaning, enlightenment, even perfection, 'however defined.' The naturalistic outlook that informs his view maintains that we are animals; but rather unusual animals; we are conscious animals living at a certain time in the broad sweep of natural and social history. 'We have fancy capacities to reflect on our motives, intentions, and behaviour and to modify, redirect, and control ourselves. We are rational animals,[617] and we are animals that make things – *Homo sapiens* and *Homo faber*.' We are also animals, who can know things, but our own nature is hardly transparent to us; we continually strive to articulate our sense of being and remake ourselves through our language practices. We are also story-telling animals; we make sense of ourselves and of things through stories, and picture

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[613] Owen Flanagan, 2002, 'Preface', *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and how to reconcile them*, Basic Books, New York, N.Y, pp. xv-xvi
[614] *Ibid*, p.x
[615] *Ibid*, 'Human Being', pp.3,4
[616] *Ibid*, 'Preface', p.xi
[617] Alasdair MacIntyre describes human beings as 'dependent, rational animals' in his 1999 *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Courts, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois.

ourselves and our world through these narratives.[618]

Cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience, Flanagan claims, have reliable methods and tools for examining and identifying the way the mind/brain works. We know enough to realise that the mind/brain 'does its magic through the operation of neurons, with axons and dendrites that form synaptic connections, and via electrical and chemical processes that mediate attention, remembering, learning, seeing, smelling, walking, talking, love, affection, benevolence, and gratitude.' But we are also fully embodied creatures. 'Genes, culture and history work through and with this extraordinarily complex tissue to make us who we are.' We do not understand all there is about 'human nature' and behaviour, but we have a good sense of what needs to be explained, and of how to go about explaining it, Flanagan believes. And we will need a combination of resources, those available in genetics, biology, psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology, history, economics, political science and naturalistic philosophy 'to understand the nature of persons.'[619]

A common mistake is to think that evolution drains the universe of all meaning and purpose. According to the theory of evolution by natural selection, 'intelligence, meaning, and purpose exist', Flanagan declares, 'as surely as blue crabs and sandbar sharks.' Evolution is a process through which life-forms, behaviours, and consciousness emerge. It is the best theory - one backed up by 'a preponderance of evidence' - we have of how these things came to be. Our thoughts, words, and actions, have meaning to us, and most of us aim to live in purposeful, meaningful ways.[620] But this is a meaning we have to find and a purpose we have to create ourselves.

Perhaps it is time to look at the context in which this theory began, what Darwin really meant, and how his contemporaries and ours have interpreted it, so we are in a better position to assess its impact and its implications for the meaning and purpose that Flanagan, like Wilson, claims we can derive from a naturalistic perspective of our

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[618] Owen Flanagan, 2002, 'Human Being', *The Problem of the Soul*, p.8
[619] *Ibid,* pp.6-7
[620] *Ibid*, p.12

'human nature.'[621] The theory of evolution developed by Charles Darwin and published in 1859 with the title *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* is therefore the next focus of our discussion, based on some of the ideas in Darwin's own writing and on Michael Ruse's wide ranging compilation, *Philosophy after Darwin*, in which he recently claimed that this theory has most contributed since towards bringing different aspects of intellectual endeavour in touch with one another in the twentieth century, though 'not always in harmonious collaboration.'[622]

6.2   Evolutionary theory: its arrival and significance

Evolution and 'Progress'

When Darwin published his great work, his ideas were applied well beyond the realm of biology. And yet, a hundred years later, as Ruse has noted, the very idea that evolutionary theory might be relevant to the problems of philosophy 'was greeted like a bad smell at a vicarage tea party.' Since then, however, evolutionary approaches to the problems of knowledge and morality have now become commonplace, if not expected.[623]

The work being done today on evolution and philosophy is in some very deep sense part of a broad cultural movement to see human beings in a naturalistic fashion. The story of this movement is not a simple one, however. 'Progress', defined as a cultural notion, was a product of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, and it was linked to

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[621] A continuing engagement with Darwinian evolution and its contemporary ramifications for other disciplines was evidenced at the recent series of colloquia of the National Academy of Sciences in the US. In one of these, Wilson was invited to deliver the opening address, 'The Four Great Books of Darwin', in which he continued to promote his vision, calling for 'a unified biology', a broader emphasis within this discipline aimed to understand the human condition. (Arthur M. Sackler Colloquium of the National Academy of Sciences, 'In the Light of Evolution IV: The Human Condition', Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center of the National Academies of Sciences and Engineering, Irvine, California, held on 10-12 December, 2009. The complete program and audio files of most presentations are available on the NAS website at www.nasonline.org./SACKLER_Human_Condition).

[622] Michael Ruse, (ed.), 2009, *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford. In this compilation, Ruse has brought together writings that cover the most influential ideas about the philosophical implications of Darwinism, from the publication of *Origin* to the most contemporary thinking and research in the fields of epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and ethics.

[623] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', *Philosophy after Darwin,* p.1. Another equally relevant collection published by Cambridge University Press in 2006, with Ruse heading the opening chapter, also illustrates this generalised trend. This is the collection *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, edited by Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele de Anna, which will be briefly discussed towards the end of this chapter.

the origins of organisms well before Darwin developed his theory. Like Diderot, people thought that such origins could be seen in the notion of the Chain of Being, where animals and plants climbed from the simple to the complex, or 'from the monad to the man.'[624] For Erasmus Darwin, Charles' grandfather, evolution was a proof of God's existence and power, and for him like for his most of his contemporaries, it was all bound up with the cultural idea of Progress.[625] The empirical facts, such as they were at the time, were essentially irrelevant. Empirical discoveries pertinent to evolutionary thought were beginning to unfold, as the fossil record began to be uncovered, but right through to the middle of the nineteenth century, evolutionary speculations continued to be, as Ruse called them, 'little more than epiphenomena on the cultural notion of Progress.'[626]

The arrival of *On the Origin* changed things dramatically in some respects, but in others it made little difference. On the positive side, there was finally a work that laid out the case for evolution, and provided a mechanism to explain it. Drawing on the thinking of political economist Thomas Robert Malthus, Darwin observed that population pressures will always exceed the available space and food supplies, and that therefore a 'struggle for existence' ensues. Darwin used such a metaphor to explain the fact that there is a large amount of variation among organisms, even those within the same species, and that in those organisms that were better adapted to survive and to reproduce, such differences might account for success or failure. The successful organisms will thus be different, and given enough time, this will lead to change, or *evolution*. The change produced by natural selection is a change of a particular kind; what today's biologists call 'adaptive complexities.' *Natural selection*

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[624] Erasmus Darwin, physician, inventor, poet, friend of leading industrialists, saw life going up the chain, 'from the blob to its apotheosis', the civilised man of the West, Ruse tells us. He wrote the following poem that illustrates the thinking of the time: 'Organic Life beneath the shoreless waves/ Was born and nurs'd in Ocean's pearly caves;/ First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass, Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;/ These, as successive generations bloom,/ New powers acquire, and larger limbs assume;/ Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,/ And breathing realms of fin, and feet, and wing.// Thus the tall Oak, the giant of the wood,/ Which bears Britannia's thunders on the flood;/ The Whale, unmeasured monster of the main,/ The lordly Lion, monarch of the plain,/ The Eagle soaring in the realms of air,/ Whose eye undazzled drinks the solar glare,/ Imperious man, who rules the bestial crowd, / Of language, reason, and reflection proud,/ With brow erect who scorns this earthy sod,/ And styles himself the image of his God;/ Arose from rudiments of form and sense,/ An embryon point, or microscopic ens!' (Erasmus Darwin 1803, 1, II. 295-341, quoted in Michael Ruse, (ed.), 2009, 'Introduction', *Philosophy After Darwin,* pp.2,3)
[625] He had said explicitly, about the notion that the organic world had a natural origin: 'This idea is analogous to the improving excellence observable in every part of the creation; …such as in the progressive increase of the wisdom and happiness of its inhabitants.' (Erasmus Darwin, 1801, 509, cited by Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', p.3)
[626] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', p.4

can account for the fact that primitive organisms are the ancestors of today's living forms; that organisms fall into patterns, and that different organisms evolve in different ways. The pressure of natural selection explains the variation between them, and our present understanding of speciation.[627]

Darwin's evolutionary theory was not an immediate success, however. First, there were serious scientific questions about selection itself, specifically about the *stability of variation*, and particularly its preservation for future generations. Darwin could not really see how this preservation could happen, as there was no theory of heredity, or genetics as we know it, available, and there was also concern about major gaps between forms in the fossil record. Lamarck had proposed an alternative mechanism of large jumps, or 'saltations' to explain the inheritance of acquired characteristics as a more effective driver of change than natural selection. Lamarckism was seen as a rival theory, but Darwin himself had already embraced it as a secondary mechanism, which he never relinquished.[628]

But the strongest opposition, as Darwin was well aware, came from the ideological bulwark of the conservative members of the established Church of England. In addition, natural selection was downplayed and even ignored, as evolution became a popular science that backed the reforms of the new and energetic leaders in Victorian Britain and elsewhere, especially across the Atlantic, and Darwin was interpreted to suit and justify the goals of the developing industrial landscape.[629] Education and medical practice, as well as the efficiency of the armed forces and local government were the targets of such reforms. Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's friend and supporter, was the leader of the education reform in Britain, but not even he was game to introduce evolution in the school curricula, uncertain as to the role it had to play. The fact is that evolution is not a story of progressive change 'where we humans have triumphed and now the task is to make an even brighter tomorrow.' Darwinian

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[627] *Ibid*, pp.4-5. Natural selection has nothing to do with progress of any kind, cultural or biological, but with reproductive success, which defines an organism's biological 'fitness' as its ability to pass on its genes.
[628] *Ibid*, pp.7,15
[629] Some of the most powerful barons of industry in the New World derived from this theory a philosophy of individualism and minimal state interference. John D. Rockefeller I is reputed to have told a Sunday School class that the law of big business is the law of God and that it is right and proper that Standard Oil, the company he founded and from which he made his fortune, should have crushed its competitors, whereas Andrew Carnegie, the founder of US Steel in Pittsburgh, took the Spencerian view of progress in a different direction, and used evolutionary justification to found public libraries, in his belief that such institutions would enable poor and gifted children to practice self-improvement. (Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Social Darwinism', p.491)

selection alone is not a predictor of who will be successful in the story for survival.[630]

Wallace's independent discovery of natural selection had spurred Darwin to put *Origin* into print, but it was Wallace's later denial of natural selection, arguing that human features are beyond causes as we know them, that made Darwin put forward his own explanation of how sexual selection can lead to racial and sexual differences, as humans of both sexes compete for mates in different ways. Adding the mechanism of 'sexual selection' to his own theory in 1871, Darwin was thus able to come back to the conclusions that he had arrived at almost forty years before: humans are animals and as such, we have evolved like every other living thing.[631]

Darwin's philosophy and reflections on morality and the common good

Even though Darwin thought of selection as a force of change as it applied to humans, he had confined explicit reference to our species to just one paragraph, almost at the end of his book. In it, he said:

In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will the thrown on the origin of man and his history.[632]

In *The Descent of Man*, which did not appear until 1871, and then in what can be seen as a supplement, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, in 1872, Darwin gave *human reason* a special place, as Kant and his predecessors had done before, writing that '[O]f all the faculties of the human mind, it will, I presume, be admitted that Reason stands at the summit.[633]

Like many Englishmen of his time, Darwin was widely read; he was acquainted with

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[630] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', pp.7-8. Ruse cites the decades-long contemporary study by Peter and Rosemary Grant of the famous Galapagos finches that got Darwin thinking about these questions, which showed that in times of drought it is the big-beaked finches that survive and reproduce, while in times of rain, when foodstuffs are abundant, it is the small-beaked finches that can eat the most and are the most successful in the struggle.
[631] Michael Ruse,.2009, 'Darwin's Epistemological Thinking', p.18
[632] Charles Darwin, 1859, 'Recapitulation and Conclusion', *The Origin of Species By Means of National Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.458
[633] From Charles Darwin, 1871, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex,* John Murray, London, p.46, quoted in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Darwin on Human Evolution', p.16

the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and was familiar with Hume's and Kant's thinking. He was also particularly interested in moral philosophy, and his many speculations sparked discussion in various areas of human knowledge.[634] Following the thinking of his time, Darwin framed in a utilitarian conception, albeit expressed in biological terms, a description of the nature of *ethical feelings* or sentiments: 'The term, *general good*, may be defined as the term by which the greatest possible number of individuals can be reared in full vigour and health, with all their faculties perfect, under the conditions to which they are exposed', as he wrote in *The Descent of Man*.[635]

Darwin was thinking here in terms of a kind of generally accepted *normative morality*, for even though by the time he wrote his *Descent* his own religious faith had faded into some kind of agnosticism, he still saw a role for religion in enforcing morality. Like most of his contemporaries, he did not abandon the idea of progress as an ultimate goal for humanity. This belief was reinforced by his conviction that natural selection acted 'solely by and for the good of each being', as he had written in the last chapter of his *Origin*, while contemplating the future of all living forms.[636] His confidence that 'all corporeal and mental endowments' in all beings would 'tend to progress towards perfection', a belief implicitly attributed to human beings in this passage, would soon meet with countless and sceptical arguments. This kind of thinking nevertheless merely reflected the hopes and aspirations of a typical English-middleclass-gentleman morality, a class to which Darwin firmly belonged.[637]

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[634] By the beginning of the following century, John Dewey, one of the leading representatives of the American philosophical school of pragmatism, wrote that Darwin's *Origin* introduced a mode of thinking that 'was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion.' Darwin's theory removed the need for a prior intelligent causal force, while it retained the idea that purposefulness accounted for the intelligibility of nature. In the 'twilight of intellectual transition' that preceded the birth of Darwin's theory, Dewey saw its potential for providing solutions to 'the old problem of design *versus* chance, mind *versus* matter, as the causal explanation, first or final, of things.' He thus claimed that with the new Darwinian logic philosophy renounced its inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities in order to explore specific values and the specific conditions that generate them. (From John Dewey, 1909, 'The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy', Henry Holt, New York, reproduced in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Darwinism and Philosophy', pp.55-61)

[635] Charles Darwin, 1871, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex,* quoted in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Darwin on Morality', p.65. Emphasis added

[636] Darwin wrote then: 'As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Silurian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.' (Charles Darwin, 1859, 'Recapitulation and Conclusion', *The Origin of Species By Means of National Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.459)

[637] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Darwin on Morality', p.66. According to Ruse, this boiled down to a sense of obligation expressed in sentiments such as: 'Slavery is wrong because it makes for unhappiness – one cannot develop as fully as a human being as one could if one were free. We have an obligation to help the poor and starving. One should

In the third chapter of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin embarks in an extensive discussion, agreeing with the judgement 'of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important.'[638] The notion of our '*moral sense*', or at least of *a disposition* towards distinguishing between right and wrong, is a question that concerned Darwin as much as the Enlightenment thinkers with whom he was well acquainted, and Hume in particular.

Darwin clearly saw the moral sense rooted in our 'social instincts', thinking it highly probable that it would have arisen with the development of intellectual powers in our progenitors. With enhanced language capacity, such powers would have enabled the expression of distinct wishes and desires by each member of the community, guiding common opinion as to 'how each member ought to act for the public good.' Public opinion would then to a large extent become the guide to action, while 'the social instincts would still give the impulse to act for the good of the community, this impulse being strengthened, directed and sometimes even deflected by public opinion', the power of which rests on 'instinctive sympathy.' We thus find that Darwin, like Hume, also believed that *habit* would have *normative power*, as it played an important part in guiding the conduct of each member, strengthening the social instincts and impulses as well as obedience 'to the wishes and judgment of the community.'[639]

By the time he wrote *The Descent of Man*, Darwin had read Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and referred to 'our sympathetic feelings', although his private notebooks suggest that the usage of the term 'sympathy' came from his reading of James Mackintosh's 1836 *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, as well as of Adam Smith, Edmund Burke and other thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, under whose shadow, and that of Hume's genius, Darwin's own work emerged.[640]

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be ever-ready to write a check for a good cause. Only a fool, ignorant of political economy, would think this meant that the working classes should be allowed to form unions to strike against the bosses in favor of better wages.'
[638] Charles Darwin, 1871, 'Chapter III. Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals – continued', *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.77
[639] *Ibid*, pp.77-78
[640] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Darwin on Morality', p.66-67

Darwin was not always clear about the role of biology in his theory, and some of the questions that began to be raised at the time concerned the level at which natural selection operates. Darwin and Wallace differed on this issue, with Darwin being inclined to *individual selection* while Wallace was often in favour of *group* effects and benefits. This was, Ruse observes, probably in part the reflection of their different socio-cultural backgrounds.[641]

Darwin also thought that 'man can generally and readily distinguish between the higher and lower moral rules'- the former being founded on the *social instincts* that relate to the welfare of others, while the 'lower' moral rules, relating chiefly to the self, he saw gradually developing by instruction and example, and eventually through public opinion. He therefore concluded that:

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If, indeed, such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience unfortunately shows us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow-creatures. *Sympathy beyond the confines of man*, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions.[642]

Aside from the unmistakeable Humean shades in this reasoning, the above sentiments could be seen to be echoed in White's aspirations for the capacious moral subject of late modernity, reaching beyond cultural and spatial boundaries in solidarity with *all* living beings, and in the many sources that Taylor draws from to paint his picture of our modern self, as well as in Wilson's environmental ethic. But any attempt to read contemporary resonances from the explanations advanced by Darwin in relation to his theory must not lose sight of the fact that, like the rest of his European contemporaries, he was not immune to the same prejudices concerning other 'less civilised' humans. And yet, the unquestioned assumptions that he shared with his

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[641] Charles Darwin was firmly upper-middle class; his maternal grandfather was Josiah Wedgewood, and the family was doing well out of Victorian trade and industry. Alfred Russel Wallace was much further down on the social scale, a fervent socialist, and a great admirer of the utopian mill owner, Robert Owen; he naturally looked upon group solidarity among the workers as a desirable thing. (Michael Ruse, 2009, p.68)
[642] Charles Darwin, 1871, 'Chapter III. Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals – continued', *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, pp.88-89. Emphasis added.

fellow countrymen about the beneficial effects of progress, seem to have also directed his belief that having established sympathy as a *moral virtue*, it would eventually spread to all 'sentient beings.'[643]

Having shown that there is a *natural proclivity* for virtuous behaviour in all humans, Darwin realised that his characterisation of our social and moral faculties presented the problem of reconciling what seemed to go against personal interest, given that, if 'a large number of members of the same tribe became endowed with these social and moral qualities', which plainly militate against individual selfish behaviour and yet serve to increase group cohesion, it would be extremely doubtful whether the offspring of 'the more sympathetic and benevolent parents' would be reared in greater number than the children of 'selfish and treacherous parents of the same tribe.'[644]

Such realisation led him to reflect on the effects of natural selection, as humans advance in civilisation from tribe to the times of the 'present day civilized nations', a discussion that occupies the next chapter of his book. With increased sociability, he thought, it is highly probable that the intellectual faculties would have been 'gradually perfected through natural selection', given that, feeling 'some degree of love', our progenitors would have developed such dispositions as 'sympathy, fidelity and courage', and these same social qualities would have enabled them to exhibit behaviours of mutual aid. Therefore:

… as the reasoning powers and foresight of the members became improved, each man would soon learn that if he aided his fellow-men, he would commonly receive aid in return. From this low motive he might acquire the habit of aiding his fellows; and the habit of performing benevolent actions certainly strengthens the feeling of sympathy which gives the first impulse to benevolent actions. Habits, moreover, followed during many generations probably tend to be inherited.[645]

Darwin is developing here what became known as '*reciprocal altruism*' as a solution to the apparent contradiction between the biological fitness of the group and that of the individual. The habit that would incline our forebears to reciprocate aid would then be reinforced, he thought, by 'another and much more powerful stimulus to the

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[643] *Ibid*, p.89
[644] *Ibid*, p.92
[645] Charles Darwin, 1871, 'Chapter V. On the Development of the Intellectual and Moral Faculties during Primeval and Civilized Times', *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.92

development of the social virtues, namely, the praise and the blame of our fellow men.' Praise and condemnation, arising primarily from 'the instinct of sympathy', would therefore curb selfish behaviour, as something that is promoted for the good of the group, and consequently selected. It is then obvious, he reasoned:

that the members of the same tribe would approve of conduct which appeared to them to be for the general good, and would reprobate that which appeared evil. *To do good unto others - to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you - is the foundation-stone of morality*. It is, therefore, hardly possible to exaggerate the importance during rude times of the love of praise and the dread of blame. A man who was not impelled by any deep, instinctive feeling, to sacrifice his life for the good of others, yet was roused to such actions by a sense of glory, would by his example excite the same wish for glory in other men, and would strengthen by exercise the noble feeling of admiration. He might thus do far more good to his tribe than by begetting offspring with a tendency to inherit his own high character.[646]

This conclusion is also reminiscent of the kind of ethos prevailing in the Greek *polis*, where virtue is valued and exercised for the common good. Darwin also seems to be aware of the importance of this historical and philosophical precedent and its role in shaping subsequent understandings of moral behaviour. He thought that as humans gained in experience and reason, the 'self-regarding virtues, such as temperance, chastity, etc.' come to be 'highly esteemed or even held sacred, thereby allowing man to perceive 'the more remote consequences of his actions.' As a result, a 'highly complex sentiment' evolves, which explains what he describes as *our moral sense*, or *conscience*:

Ultimately a highly complex sentiment, having its first origin in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow men, ruled by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious feelings, confirmed by instruction and habit, all combined, constitute our moral sense or conscience.[647]

Like Huxley, Darwin felt that the strengthening of our sympathies comes about not only by reason and experience, but by the habit created by 'instruction during youth, and religious feelings.'[648] These are all fine sentiments, but the influence of some of his contemporaries, W.R. Greg, Alfred Wallace, and also his cousin, Francis

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[646] *Ibid*, p.93. Emphasis added
[647] *Ibid*
[648] *Ibid,* p.96

Galton,[649] all of whom Darwin refers to in his work, seems to have led him to some problematic conclusions, as he discussed 'the agency of natural selection on civilised nations', linking this mechanism to the advancement of progress, which he indisputably saw as 'the normal rule in human society.'[650]

'Social Darwinism'

Darwin's vision for the future of mankind was founded on his belief that the development of our moral and intellectual faculties should lead us 'to do good unto others.' Seeing this precept as the foundation of morality, the desirability of progress could be advanced without contradiction as the ultimate goal of a civilised nation. Whether the position that became known as 'social Darwinism', could be genuinely applied to Darwin himself is still a source of debate among scholars.[651] It was Herbert Spencer, Darwin's contemporary, who had first used the phrase 'the survival of the fittest' that Darwin subsequently adopted, and who had previously suggested that humans are driven by the struggle for existence and that as a consequence of this, there is a 'picking' or, in today's terminology, differential reproduction.[652]

This kind of thinking led to the view that since the main process of evolution is natural selection, we should promote selection in society, and let natural processes take their toll, with the best rising to the top and the weakest and worst going to the wall and failing.[653] Although more popular than Darwin in his day, the manner in

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[649] According to Matt Ridley, it was Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, who in 1874 ignited the nature-nurture controversy that we have come to recognise in its present form. Galton asserted that human personalities were born, not made by experience. Galton's insistence on innate explanations of human abilities had led him to espouse eugenics, a term he coined, and which was enthusiastically adopted by Nazism. Tainted by this association, the idea of innate behaviour was in full retreat for most of the middle years of the century. (See Matt Ridley, 'What Makes You Who You Are', *Time*, 0040781X, 6/2/2003, Vol. 161, Issue 22, 2003)

[650] Charles Darwin, 1871, 'Chapter V. On the Development of the Intellectual and Moral Faculties during Primeval and Civilized Times', *The Descent of Man*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.94

[651] John Burrow, the editor of the 1985 edition of Darwin's *Origin*, claims that Darwin himself did not endorse the application of his theory in social contexts, and that the theory of evolution in fact showed 'how the existence of marked racial differences need not lead us to deny the biological unity of the human family.' (John Burrow, 1985, 'Editor's Introduction', Charles Darwin, 1859, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.44)

[652] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Social Darwinism', p.490

[653] Despite these sentiments, Spencer seems to have believed that competition, in the sense of strife in society, rises to a point where it starts to fade away and people live in harmony. Nevertheless, his unquestioned belief in 'the natural order of things' is illustrated in the following extract: 'We must call those spurious philanthropists, who, to prevent present misery, would entail greater misery upon future generations. All defenders of a Poor Law must, however, be classed among such. That rigorous necessity which, when allowed to act on them, becomes so sharp a spur to the lazy and so strong a bridle to the random, these pauper's friends would repeal, because of the wailing it here and there produces. Blind to the fact that under the natural order of things, society is constantly excreting its

which Spencer presented these notions, in what was nevertheless characteristic Victorian thinking, made his reputation sink from the beginning of the twentieth century. In his enthusiasm for tying the idea of biological improvement to the notion of Progress in humankind, Spencer frequently compared the superiority of Europeans, attributing to them a higher intelligence when compared to that of more 'primitive', and therefore inferior, people.[654]

Spencer's commitment to evolution also made him assert that the key to ethics must be the production and preservation of human life, even though he tied the notion of the goodness of life to a kind of utilitarianism.[655] His thinking represented a trend that was followed by many, as evolutionary theory at the time was, as Ruse describes it, 'less a mature professional science and more a science of the popular domain.'[656] Huxley at first held the general Spencerian position that evolution is progressive and worth promoting, but some sad events in his own personal life made him doubt this notion. Much later, in a prestigious lecture at Oxford, he turned to the relationship between evolution and ethics that reflected Darwin's ideas, but also showed his uneasy relationship with Spencer. He claimed then that evolution is progressive, but that as we work towards friendship, love and peace, biology must be opposed by culture, as that is the way of proper ethical behaviour.[657]

6.3 Contemporary developments arising from evolutionary theory

The arrival of genetics and 'the new synthesis'

In the early part of the twentieth century, evolutionary theory had become a

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unhealthy, imbecile, slow, vacillating, faithless members, these unthinking, though well-meaning men, advocate an interference which not only stops the purifying process but even increases the vitiation – absolutely encourages the multiplication of the reckless and incompetent by offering them an unfailing provision, and *discourages* the multiplication of the competent and provident by heightening the prospective difficulty of maintaining a family.' (From Herbert Spencer, 1851, *Social Statistics*, pp.323-24, quoted in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.69)

[654] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Herbert Spencer', pp.20-22

[655] *Ibid*, p.70

[656] Among some of the writers where Spencer's influence was strongest, Ruse lists the American Yale professor William Graham Summer, the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie, the English mathematician and in later life ardent eugenicist Karl Pearson, and of course, some of the militarism of the German variety, who embraced, as General Friedrich von Bernhardi did, the notion that 'might is right', which was later to be adopted in some of the thinking of the National Socialist movement. (Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Herbert Spencer', p.71)

[657] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Thomas Henry Huxley', pp.75-76

justification for many an outlandish idea.[658] The social sciences were also trying to establish themselves as respectable enterprises, and although some of their representatives took evolution very seriously, many argued that a psychological, a sociological, or an anthropological approach to 'human nature' was what was needed. Biology was at best a background, particularly as the ideas about race perpetuated by the National Socialist movement made many English-speaking social scientists even more convinced that one should have nothing to do with evolution, or with claims that biology was relevant to the study of humankind.

By this time, a new group of experimental biologists, working on problems pertaining to the cell and heredity, began to build a theory of evolution based on Gregor Mendel's earlier discoveries, which postulated *genes* as basic units of function in a population [659] This made possible the arrival of genetics on the scene around the 1930s, when Ronald A. Fisher and J.B.S. Haldane in Britain, and Sewall Wright in America, put Mendel's discoveries into practice. Following on the steps that Fisher, Haldane and Wright had carved, an important school of 'ecological geneticists' set out to explain the biological changes that one actually finds in nature.[660] As the '*new synthesis*' that melded Darwinism with Mendelism developed, a vital, empirical theory was set in motion. This modern theory, usually called the 'synthetic theory' in America, and 'neo-Darwinism' in Britain, brought in times of great excitement as well as great tension for evolutionary biology. The discovery of the double helix, the molecular structure of DNA, by James Watson and Francis Crick in 1962 was a significant turning point that opened the way for great medical and technological advances. Soon evolutionary biologists began to see that the new techniques of *molecular biology* could yield answers to evolutionary problems, while molecular

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[658] Matters were not much helped when, at the beginning of the century, a number of thinkers, notably the German biologist Wilhelm Driesch and the French philosopher Henri Bergson started to push a kind of Aristotelian teleology, suggesting that there are life forces - entelechies or *élans vitaux* - that inform organisms and guide their evolutionary directions. (Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part III. The Evolution of Ideas', p.157)

[659] Around the time of Darwin, but unrecognised for many years, Gregor Mendel, an obscure Moravian monk, had discovered and worked on basic units of function - soon to be called 'genes' - that are passed on unchanged from generation to generation. Considered as units in a population, what came to be known as a 'gene pool', one could readily show that these genes remain in constant proportions down through time unless acted upon by external forces, selection for instance. (Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction, The Arrival of Genetics', pp.8-9)

[660] In Britain, E.B. Ford founded his school in 1964. Before that, the key figure in America was Russian-born geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, author of *Genetics and the Origin of Species* in 1937. He was joined shortly by the German-born systematist Ernst Mayr, author of *Systematics and the Origin of Species* in 1942; palaeontologist George Gaylord Simpson, author of *Tempo and Mode in Evolution*, in 1944; and a year or two after by botanist G. Ledyard Stebbins, with his *Variation and Evolution in Plants*, in 1950. Back in England, a grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, Julian Huxley, was writing a semi-popular overview, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, which appeared in 1942 (Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', p.9)

biologists began to turn increasingly to problems that in turn involved questions about evolution. Thus, each side learned from one another.[661]

With a move to empirical science as a guide and foundation for philosophy, there was also a move to *naturalism*. Thomas Kuhn argued around the middle of the century that the transition from one paradigm to another in science can never be seen as absolute progress, even as he saw in science a 'developmental process', with successive stages marked by an increase in articulation and specialisation, and every stage in the development of scientific knowledge 'a better exemplar.' Such a view of science is simply compatible with close observation of scientific life, which Kuhn believed gives us 'strong arguments for employing it in attempts to solve the host of problems that still remain.'[662]

As Darwin's theory was successively revised, augmented, and improved, it has given rise, in the way that Kuhn predicted, to new research in human development, powered by the molecular revolution in biology. *Evolutionary biology* can now trace the actions of the genes in great detail, showing how evolution has left its mark, and how it has contributed to our physical and mental development. *Evolutionary psychology*, developing later from *sociobiology*, has used some of these studies to make important findings about our thinking and about our individual behaviour, aided by recent advances in *cognitive* and *neurobiology*. This particular discipline, which applied some of these discoveries to understand how much of our individual and social behaviour can be said to be affected by our genetic makeup and how much it owes to our social development, is still, like its predecessor, somewhat controversial. All this has led to ongoing discussion and research, and to debates that have often divided contemporary thinking in the sciences and in the humanities.

Animal and human behaviour: From ethology to sociobiology

One of the earliest attempts in the century to link evolution to a biological understanding of the mind was made by Konrad Lorenz, a Nobel laureate and one of

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[661] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Introduction', p.9
[662] Thomas Kuhn, 1962, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, Part III, 'The Evolution of Ideas', pp.176-7

the founders of ethology, the forerunner of sociobiology. Concerned initially with the study of animal behaviour, *ethology* has developed a strong relation to disciplines such as neuroanatomy, ecology and evolution, and is now a well recognised scientific discipline.[663] From its early beginnings in continental Europe during the years prior to World War II, it became stronger in the UK when Lorenz's friend and scientific collaborator Niko Tinbergen moved to the University of Oxford after the war, and soon extended to North America.[664]

In 1972, the International Society for Human Ethology was founded to promote the exchange of knowledge concerning human behaviour, based on the application of ethological principles and methods, and began publishing their own journal, *The Human Ethology Bulletin*. Since then, *human ethology* has developed in different directions, enabling a spectrum of approaches in the modern scientific study of behaviour, which goes from animal cognition to more traditional comparative psychology, ethology, sociobiology and behavioural ecology, as well as evolutionary psychology, including most recently in a sub-discipline called 'peace ethology.'[665] The line of inquiry that ethological studies developed has continued, driven since by a stronger, but more sophisticated Darwinism.

Lorenz published his views in a German philosophical journal in 1941, but his work did not appear in English until 1962, and it was not until about 1980 that it became

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[663] Although many naturalists have studied aspects of animal behaviour throughout history, the modern discipline of ethology is generally considered to have begun during the 1930s with the work of Dutch biologist Nikolaas Tinbergen and Austrian biologists Konrad Lorenz and Karl von Frisch, joint winners of the 1973 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Ethologists are typically interested in a behavioural process rather than in a particular animal group, and often study one type of behaviour (e.g. aggression) in a number of unrelated animals. ('Ethology', Wikipedia, accessed May, 2010)

[664] Between the 1920s and 1930s, Lorenz developed a reputation as a scientist, and by the 1930s, he was forging a new theory of instinctive behaviour with his Dutch friend, Niko Tinbergen. Patrick Bateson relates how Lorenz had been struck in his observations by, for example, how a few days after hatching, a hand-reared duckling touches with its bill a pimple above its tail and then wipes its bill over its down, at a time when this pimple, which becomes an oil-producing gland in the adult, is not yet functional and the duckling would normally be oiled by the feathers of its brooding mother. Observations such as this led Lorenz to conclude that 'behaviour patterns which were well adapted by evolution to the biological needs of the animal are qualitatively distinct from behaviour acquired through learning', which apparently led Lorenz to contest fiercely what he regarded as the orthodoxies of American behaviourist psychology, with its almost exclusive emphasis on learning.' (Patrick Bateson, 'The Rise of Ethology' in 'Taking the Stink Out of Instinct', in Rose, Steven and Hilary Rose, eds., 2001, *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, Vintage, Random House Australia, Pty. Ltd., Sydney, p.160. At the time of publication of his essay, Bateson was Professor of Ethology at Cambridge University).

[665] In 1970, Robert Ardrey's book *The Social Contract: A Personal Inquiry into the Evolutionary Sources of Order and Disorder* was published. The book and study investigated animal behaviour and then compared human behaviour as a similar phenomenon. During 2008, in a paper published in the journal *Behaviour*, ethologist Peter Verbeek introduced the term 'Peace Ethology' as a sub-discipline of Human Ethology that is concerned with issues of human conflict, conflict resolution, reconciliation, war, peacemaking, and peacekeeping behaviour. ('Ethology', Wikipedia, accessed May, 2010)

widely known.[666] Contrasting the Kantian viewpoint of 'transcendental' or 'critical' idealism, with an organic, biological view of human reasoning, Lorenz challenged Kant's assertion that 'the-thing-in-itself' is on principle unknowable because the form of its appearance is determined by the purely ideal forms and categories of intuition. 'Is not human reason with all its categories and forms of intuition something that has organically evolved in a continuous cause-effect relationship with the laws of the immediate nature, just as has the human brain?' Lorenz asked. The relationship between the thing-in-itself and the specific a priori form of its appearance, he claimed, has been determined by the fact that the latter developed as 'an adaptation'

…in the coping negotiation with these continuously present laws during the evolutionary history of mankind, lasting hundreds of millennia. This adaptation has provided our thought with an innate structuralization which corresponds to a considerable degree to the reality of the external world.[667]

Lorenz's thinking shows a deep philosophical, as well as a biological understanding, of questions concerning the functioning of the human mind and its interrelation between its organic or *innate*, in evolutionary terms, structures and the effect of *experience* on its *reasoning capacity*. He also emphasised the mind's *plasticity* in a way that anticipates recent findings in contemporary neuroscience, and linked it to its ability to function in a free, unfettered manner:

If a biologist attempts to grasp the relationship of hereditary structure to the regulated plasticity of all that is organic, he arrives at a universal law holding both for physical and intellectual structures and as valid for the plastic protoplasm and the skeletal elements of a protozoan as for the categorical forms of thought and the creative plasticity of the human mind. From its simplest beginnings in the domain of the protozoa, solid structure is just as much a condition for any higher evolution as is organic plasticity. In this sense, solid structure is just as indispensable and as consistent a property of living matter as is its plastic freedom.[668]

Lorenz is careful to point out that 'a solid structure' is just as important as plasticity, as the above passage indicates. For every living being, increasing mental differentiation and physical differentiation is always a compromise between these two extremes, but in this process of 'differentiation to a higher level of mechanical

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[666] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part IV, The Evolution of Rationality', in Ruse, M., 2009, p.223
[667] Konrad Lorenz, 1941/1982, 'Kant's Doctrine of the A Priori in the Light of Contemporary Biology', in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part IV, The Evolution of Rationality', p.233
[668] *Ibid*, p.237

structure' there is always the dangerous tendency to fetter the mind and to prevent its further evolution:

The hard exoskeleton of the arthropods is such an obstruction to evolution, as is also the fixed instinctual movements of many higher organisms and the industrial machinery of man. Indeed, every system of thought that commits itself to a nonplastic "absolute" has this same fettering effect.[669]

In an almost Heideggerian turn of phrase, Lorenz concludes that '[O]nly in the state of becoming is the philosopher a human being in the most proper meaning of the word.' And he finds in the pragmatic, but 'beautiful definition of man', taken from one of his contemporaries, the clearest formulation of this idea: 'Man is defined as the permanently unfinished being, permanently unadapted and poor in structure, but continuously open to the world, continuously in the state of becoming.'[670]

Lorenz makes it clear that his view that all human thought 'is only a working hypothesis' should not be interpreted as lowering the value of the knowledge secured by humankind, for even if nothing is 'absolutely true', every new piece of knowledge, every new truth, is nevertheless a step forward in a very definite, definable direction. Human science must thus be 'like a scaffolding for reaching the greatest possible height', but something that corresponds to solid structures and scaffolding in science must always be provisional, alterable at any time. At the same time, however:

The character of all truths as working hypotheses must always be kept in mind, in order to prevent the necessity of demolishing the established structure, and in order to preserve for the "established" truths, that eternal value which they potentially deserve.[671]

Lorenz's own conception that *a priori* forms of thought and intuition have to be understood just as any other organic adaptation gives it the conviction that 'something actual adequately corresponds to every phenomenon in our world.'[672] This empirical approach leads him to conclude that the forms of perception and categories 'are not the mind, but rather are tools the mind uses. They are innate structures that on the one hand support, but on the other hand make for rigidity like all that is solid.'[673]

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[669] Konrad Lorenz, 1941/1982, 'Kant's Doctrine of the A Priori in the Light of Contemporary Biology', p.238
[670] *Ibid*, p.238. Lorenz refers here to Gehlen's book *Der Mensch*, but does not give any other details.
[671] *Ibid,* p.239
[672] *Ibid*
[673] *Ibid*, p.245

Kant's 'great conception of the idea of freedom' is impoverished, according to Lorenz, by being tied to 'the rigidly mechanical laws of pure reason.' He rather prefers to think that what is 'specifically human' in all of us is something that more firmly celebrates our freedom. This is:

the conscious drive not to get stuck, not to become a vehicle running on rails, but rather to maintain a youthful openness to the world, and to come closer to actuality through a constant reciprocal interaction with it.[674]

Kant talked about 'the spark of light' that accompanied intellectual progress, and Lorenz's own attempt to look at human reason naturalistically, while redeeming the Kantian concept of freedom, prefigures the developments that would further our species intellectual advances, as science became more adept at examining the manner in which our 'human nature' has developed and responded to specific evolutionary pressures and constraints, and the many and sophisticated physical and mental adaptations that have tuned us and our minds to live and function in consonance with a changing world.

Sociobiology: the origins of an ongoing debate

Lorenz's measured approach to the understanding of human reasoning could not have paved the way for the next attempt to link evolution to our understanding of 'human nature', as translations of his work were not yet available in English at the time. As things stood, the arrival of *sociobiology* on the scene in the English-speaking scientific community was not particularly auspicious. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*,[675] appeared in 1975 in the midst of a very intense political climate and was immediately seen to represent everything that the left disliked about the neo-conservative regimes that had just come to power in both the US and in Britain. Those of Wilson's colleagues who raised the more vocal objections to this work - revisited extensively following the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication[676] - and who

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[674] *Ibid*, pp.245-6
[675] Edward O. Wilson, Wilson, 1975/2000, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England.
[676] Published in the wake of the 'new synthesis' in evolutionary biology, Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* triggered a debate that still seems to rise from time to time. Its reprint in 2000 was a reminder of the original reaction against this work. The vehement opposition to the ideas presented in *Sociobiology* was born in a fraught

developed their criticism later with the publication of their own book, were committed to exposing the dangers of an ideology which they associated with biological determinism and the New Right, as the following passage shows:

The point is not merely that biological determinists are often somewhat naïve political and social philosophers. One of the issues with which we must come to grips is that, despite its frequent claim to be neutral and objective, science is not and cannot be above 'mere' human politics. The complex interaction between the evolution of scientific theory and the evolution of social order means that very often the ways in which scientific research asks its questions of the human and natural worlds it proposes to explain are deeply colored by social, cultural and political biases.[677]

These equally reputable scientists had similar objectives to Wilson, as they too wished to achieve 'an integrated understanding of the relationship between the biological and the social.'[678] Nevertheless, the controversy grew with increased vehemency, and extended to Richard Dawkins and the book he published a year later.[679] Dawkins had said in *The Selfish Gene* that consciousness freed people from the tyranny of the genes, but he too found himself accused of supporting right-wing ideology.[680] While

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political climate that extended to Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*, published a year after Wilson's, in 1976. It all began with a letter to the *New York Review of Books* signed by a committee calling itself the Sociobiology Study Group. Among the sixteen signatories were two of Wilson's colleagues at Harvard and, he thought, friends: Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin. The letter accused Wilson of providing: '…a genetic justification of the status quo and of existing privileges for certain groups according to class, race, or sex…Such theories provided an important basis for the enactment of sterilization laws and restrictive immigration laws by the United States between 1910 and 1930 and also for the eugenics policies which led to the establishment of gas chambers in Nazi Germany.' (Extract of Letter, in Matt Ridley, *Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience and What Makes Us Human*, HarperCollins Publishers Inc., New York, 2003, p.243).

A small group among these scientists in Britain soon re-ignited the original debate, with the publication of *Not in Our Genes*, in 1984. Its authors, Steven Rose, Richard Lewontin and Leon Kamin, suggested that sociobiology was an attempt by the capitalist ruling elite to justify its continued domination of society, and the controversy that emerged resulted in a surge of publications. In his discussion of these events, Robin Dunbar points to Howard Kaye's 1986 book, *The Social Meaning of Modern Biology,* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT), in which Kaye takes Rose and his colleagues to task, saying that with such a claim, 'they are mindlessly trotting out a party line that bears little or no relationship to reality.' Dunbar also recalls Ulrica Segerstrale's comment to the effect that Rose and Lowentin, two of the main authors that contributed to the attack of Wilson's theory, shared with him 'a number of key objectives, including a commitment to political (as opposed to economic) liberalism, a desire to break the stranglehold that organized religion has over the minds and lives of ordinary men and women and a belief in the need for a planned and more equitable society. Their deep-rooted antagonism towards sociobiology is all the more baffling because many of the founding fathers of sociobiology, (including, for example, the English biologists J.B.S. Haldane and John Maynard Smith) have impeccable socialist credentials.' (Dunbar, R., 1995, 'Divided Loyalties', *The Trouble with Science*, p.179)

[677] Steven Rose, R.C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, 1984, 'The New Right and the Old Determinism', *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature*, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, p.8

[678] *Ibid,* p.11

[679] Wilson's lectures were picketed, and leaflets handed to students in Harvard Square accused him of postulating 'genes for all social life, including war, business success, male supremacy and racism', while Lewontin accused Wilson of reflecting the ideologies of the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century. (Ridley, M., 2003, *Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience and What Makes Us Human*, p.244)

[680] Dawkins has had to defend his theory since the publication of his book. In fact, in an interview on the ABC television program Compass, around the end of August, 2006, Dawkins repeated what he has been constantly asserting: the fact that humans have 'selfish' genes does not mean that they are necessarily selfish individuals.

Wilson's speculations about human behaviour could have been a bit naïve and premature at the time, as Steven Pinker, a formidable defender of Wilson, has noted, the invective of some of his critics was largely unjustified.[681] Some of the scholars who had inspired Wilson, namely William Hamilton and Robert Trivers, also became targets of similar attacks, as did anthropologists Irven DeVore and Lionel Tiger when they tried to teach these ideas.[682]

Wilson has continued to explore the link between *genetic* and *cultural evolution* since. In a more recent collaboration, drawing from the neurosciences, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary theory, he and Charles Lumsden focus on the interaction between genes and culture, or 'gene-culture coevolution.'[683] This is a process whereby physiologically based preferences, or *epigenetic* rules, channel cultural transmission, potentially influencing the outcome of cultural evolution. Both Wilson and Lumsden are particularly careful to stress in this work that, while genes can act to influence mental development and culture, 'genetic prescription and free will' are nevertheless compatible.[684]

A spotlight on altruism: culturally or biologically determined?

The question of how or to what extent biology or culture determines our patterns of behaviour when it comes to morality is inevitably linked to the earliest observations that Darwin made on what we now call *reciprocal altruism* as a significant component of human morality. Wilson's 1978 book, *On Human Nature,* discusses his

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Richard Dawkins closes *The Selfish Gene* as follows: 'We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination…We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.'

[681] Steven Pinker, 2002, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.108

[682] Trivers was at the time a political radical and a supporter of the Black Panthers, as Pinker observes, as well as a scholarly evolutionary biologist. Trivers wrote about the attacks on him and his colleagues as follows: 'Although some of the attackers were prominent biologists, the attack seemed intellectually feeble and lazy. Gross errors in logic were permitted as long as they appeared to give some tactical advantage in the political struggle…Because we were hirelings of the dominant interests, said these fellow hirelings of the same interests, we were their mouthpieces, employed to deepen the [deceptions] with which the ruling elite retained their unjust advantage. Although it follows from evolutionary reasoning that individuals will tend to argue in ways that are ultimately (sometimes unconsciously) self-serving, it seemed a priori unlikely that evil should reside so completely in one set of hirelings and virtue in the other.' (From Trivers, R., 'Sociobiology and Politics', in E. White, ed., *Sociobiology and Human Politics,* Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1981, p.37, quoted by Steven Pinker, 2002, *The Blank Slate,* p.111)

[683] Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, 1981, *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

[684] Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, 1981,'Genes, Mind, and Ideology', *The Sciences*, November, p.6

ongoing preoccupation with the common, as well as the biological understandings of the term. Granting that *social evolution* in humans is 'obviously more cultural than genetic,' and that altruistic behaviour is largely *culturally* determined, Wilson endeavours nevertheless to find sociobiological explanations of altruism:

> To anticipate a common objection raised by many social scientists and others, let me grant at once that the form and intensity of altruistic acts are to a large extent culturally determined. Human social evolution is obviously more cultural than genetic. The point is that the underlying emotion, powerfully manifested in virtually all human societies, is what is considered to evolve through genes. The sociobiological hypothesis does not therefore account for differences among societies, but it can explain why human beings differ from other mammals and why, in one narrow aspect, they more closely resemble social insects.[685]

The evolutionary theory of human altruism is greatly complicated by its ultimately self-serving quality, Wilson observes, but given that no sustained form of human altruism is 'explicitly and totally self-annihilating', he feels that we can be justified in seeking a more conventional *biological* explanation for this human behaviour. A narrow interpretation of Darwinian selection would predict that self-sacrifice results in fewer descendants, since 'the genes that allow heroes to be created can be expected to disappear gradually from the population.'[686] Darwin solved this quandary by appealing to the basic *sympathy* that he thought underlies our *social instincts*, suggesting, as we recall, that social approbation and habit would be needed to reinforce most altruistic behaviour that was not directed towards our immediate kin.

Reflecting on the way that many cultural practices and religious ways of life seem to lavish preoccupation with the self and close relatives, but do not encourage compassion for unrelated individuals, or outsiders, leads Wilson to conclude that compassion is *selective* and often self-serving. It is 'flexible and eminently adaptable to political reality; that is to say, it conforms to the best interests of self, family, and allies of the moment.'[687] In order to understand this 'strange selectivity' and resolve the puzzle of human altruism, Wilson distinguishes between two basic forms of cooperative behaviour. In the first kind, the altruistic impulse 'can be irrational and

[685] Edmund O. Wilson, 1978, 'Altruism', chapter 7, *On Human Nature*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, Part V, 'Ethics and Progress', p.335
[686] *Ibid*, p.334
[687] *Ibid*, pp.333-5

unilaterally directed at others', a conduct that expects no equal return and is performed without a conscious desire leading to this end. This is *'hard-core' altruism*, a set of responses relatively unaffected by social reward or punishment. This kind of altruism declines steeply in frequency and intensity as relationship becomes more distant, as Darwin reasoned. *'Soft-core' altruism* is 'ultimately selfish' in contrast, as those exhibiting this kind of behaviour expect reciprocation from society or closest relatives. It is calculating, often in a wholly conscious way, and its ends are orchestrated by the intricate sanctions and demands of society. This form of altruism can thus be expected to have evolved 'primarily by selection of individuals and to be deeply influenced by the vagaries of cultural evolution.'[688]

The important distinction that has persisted from probably as far back as the Ice Age, is between 'the ingroup and the outgroup', with the precise location of the dividing line shifting back and forth with ease. Nevertheless, given that our altruistic impulse is so powerful, Wilson observes, it is fortunate that it is also 'mostly soft', as otherwise nepotism and racism would prevail in human history. Furthermore, because there is in us 'a flawed capacity for a social contract, mammalian in its limitations, combined with a perpetually renewing optimistic cynicism', rational people, he concludes, can accomplish a great deal.[689]

In the light of these observations, Wilson does not think that culture can alter human behaviour to approach 'altruistic perfection', as he recalls some of the main religious and political formulations that humanity has devised that have contended for supremacy through our history.[690] The precepts that underlie our morality, chosen by intuition and *based on emotion*, are, he contends, 'primarily biological in origin and are likely to do no more than reinforce the primitive social arrangements.' Such a morality is then 'unconsciously shaped to give new rationalizations for the consecration of the group, the proselytizing role of altruism, and the defense of territory.' To the extent that principles are chosen by *knowledge and reason* remote

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[688] *Ibid*, p.336
[689] *Ibid*, pp.339-40
[690] To underscore the impossibility of reaching this goal, he quotes from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*: 'If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?' (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, quoted in Edward O. Wilson, 1978, 'Altruism', chapter 7, *On Human Nature*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.341)

from biology, however, Wilson agrees that they can, 'at least in theory be non-Darwinian.' But as to whether 'the cultural evolution of higher ethical values' can gain a direction and momentum of its own and completely replace genetic evolution, Wilson does not think that possible, given that:

The genes hold culture on a leash. The leash is very long, but inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool. The brain is the product of evolution. Human behaviour – like the deepest capacities for emotional response which drive and guide it – is the circuitous technique by which human genetic material has been and will be kept intact. Morality has no other demonstrable ultimate function.[691]

A new paradigm for a Darwinian left

We have now a better understanding of the way in which evolutionary theory refers to such concepts as 'genes', 'selfishness' and 'altruism', but does this mean that the sense of ourselves as free and rational moral agents is an illusion? These questions continue to occupy a number of philosophers, biologists, social scientists and other thinkers in a variety of disciplines, something which may in itself suggest that a new paradigm that integrates this fast-developing knowledge, as Kuhn envisaged, is already in the horizon.

In one of his earlier publications, Peter Singer, the well-known philosopher and human and animal rights campaigner, had already showed an interest in the connection between ethics and sociobiology.[692] His 2000 book, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*,[693] is an argument for the contribution of modern Darwinian biology to the elucidation of social principles and moral norms. It could also be seen as defining, in line with Kuhn, the new paradigm that Singer believes that the left now needs. He thus suggests that a source of ideas that could revitalise the left could be found in 'an approach to human, social, political, and economic behaviour based firmly on a *modern understanding of human nature.*' This means, therefore, that:

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[691] Edward O. Wilson, 1978, 'Altruism', chapter 7, *On Human Nature*, in Michael Ruse, 2009, pp.341-42
[692] Peter Singer, 1981, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York.
[693] Peter Singer, 2000, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

It is time for the left to take seriously the fact that we are evolved animals, and that we bear the evidence of our inheritance, not only in our anatomy, and our DNA, but in our behaviour too. In other words, it is time to develop a Darwinian left.[694]

The left's 'understandable but unfortunate mistake' in regard to Darwinian thinking according to Singer, has been to accept the assumptions of the right, starting with the idea that the Darwinian struggle for existence corresponds to the vision of nature suggested by Tennyson's memorable phrase, 'nature red in tooth and claw.' This has been applied to social behaviour, making the competitive marketplace somehow justified, as natural, or inevitable. Until the 1960s, the role that cooperation can play in improving an organism's prospects of survival and reproductive success was largely ignored, even by evolutionary theorists. As a result, Singer believes, nineteenth-century Darwinism was more congenial to the right than to the left.[695]

Singer's own vision of what a Darwinian left would look like includes the principles it would be based on and those it would reject. Heading the list, Singer maintains that a Darwinian left would 'accept that there is such a thing as human nature, and seek to find out more about it, so that policies can be grounded on the best available evidence of what human beings are like.' This does not mean accepting any inference from what is 'natural' to what is 'right' though. Singer emphasises the importance of promoting structures that foster cooperation rather than competition, and exhorts us to 'work toward a higher moral status for nonhuman animals, and a less anthropocentric view of our dominance over nature.' A Darwinian left should stand by the traditional values of the left by being on the side of the weak, poor and oppressed, but it would also 'think very carefully about what social and economic changes will really work to benefit them.'[696]

Evolutionary biology in moral philosophy and epistemology

In further examining the role of modern biology in our understanding of moral

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[694] Peter Singer, 'A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation', in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part V, Ethics and Progress', p.343
[695] *Ibid*, p.343
[696] *Ibid,*p.348

thought and action, in 1986 Ruse and Wilson wrote in a joint article, 'Moral Philosophy as Applied Science':[697]

Everything human, including the mind and culture, has a material base and originated during the evolution of the human genetic constitution and its interaction with the environment. To say this much is not to deny the great creative power of culture, or to minimize the fact that most causes of human thought and behaviour are still poorly understood. The important point is that modern biology can account for many of the unique properties of the species. Research on the subject is accelerating, quickly enough to lend plausibility to the belief that the human condition can eventually be understood to its foundations, including the sources of moral reasoning.[698]

Biology, according to Ruse and Wilson, shows that 'internal moral premises do exist and can be defined more precisely', and that the constraints on human development are the sources of our strongest feelings of right and wrong, which are powerful enough to serve as a formulation for ethical codes.[699]

As they review the various Darwinian mechanisms that may account for our 'moral sense', such as kin selection and altruism, Ruse and Wilson give 'epigenetic rules' particular attention, following the line that Wilson had previously adopted in his writings from *On Human Nature* onwards. Wilson also claimed later in his *Consilience* that 'the etiology of culture wends its way tortuously from the genes through the brain and senses to learning and social behaviour,' explaining that our inherited neurobiological traits cause us to see the world in a particular way and 'to learn certain behaviors in preference to other behaviors', and that this developmental bias, as psychologist Martin Seligman and others had discovered, meant:

…that animals and humans are innately prepared to learn certain behaviors, while being counter-prepared against - that is, predisposed to avoid - others. The many documented examples of prepared learning form a subclass of *epigenetic rules*.[700]

The evolutionary argument, Ruse and Wilson had concluded earlier, 'discounts the possibility of an *objective*, external reference for morality', seeing moral codes

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[697] Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, 1986, 'Moral Philosophy as Applied Science', *Philosophy* 61:173:92, reproduced in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part V, Ethics and Progress', pp.365-379
[698] *Ibid*, p.366
[699] *Ibid,* pp.366-68
[700] Edmund O. Wilson, 1999, 'From Genes to Culture', *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, p.163

instead as created 'by culture under the biasing influence of the epigenetic rules and legitimated by the illusion of objectivity.'[701] Such reasonably moderate statements had also met with some adverse reaction, notably that of Philip Kitcher, who in 1994 wrote an article in which he saw Wilson's earlier work and similar proposals as an attempt to 'biologicise' ethics.[702]

Kitcher's article also advocated integrating evolutionary ideas with neuroscience, psychology, and various parts of social science, as Ruse and Wilson had suggested. However, if it is supposed that morality consists in the expression of the 'deepest' human desires, Kitcher stated, then it must be shown how, '*without appeal to extrabiological moral principles*', certain desires of an individual are taken to be privileged and how the confliction of desires of different individuals are adjudicated.' Accordingly, the steps leading from biology to morality must be plainly identified, so that those adhering to such notions can explain 'what species of inference leads from those premises to the intended normative conclusion.'[703]

Ruse can be seen to provide a kind of response to Kitcher's demands, expanding in a subsequent article in his collection some of the notions he had previously advanced in his and Wilson's collaboration and in his own book, published also in 1986.[704] Here, Ruse identifies with Hume, rather than with Kant, and opts for a middle position, which is closer to Hilary Putnam's 'internal realism.'[705] Believing that 'modern evolutionary biology, specifically modern neo-Darwinian evolutionary biology', throws significant light on questions related to the theory of knowledge, Ruse wants his approach to evolutionary epistemology to be seen as 'a *critical* defense.'[706]

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[701] *Ibid*, p.376
[702] Philip Kitcher, 1994, 'Four Ways to "Biologicize" Ethics', in Elliott Sober, (ed.), *Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., reproduced in Michael Ruse, 2009, Part V, Ethics and Progress, pp.379-388
[703] *Ibid*, pp.380-7
[704] Michael Ruse, 'The View from Somewhere: a Critical Defence of Evolutionary Epistemology', in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.247-75. Ruse expands here on the ideas that he explored in his 1986 book *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*.
[705] Putnam defines this concept as follows: '"Truth," in an internalitst view is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability - some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system - and not correspondence with mind-independent 'states of affairs.' There is no God's Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve.' (Hilary Putnam, 1981, *Reason, Truth, and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.49-50, quoted in Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Part IV, The Evolution of Rationality', *Philosophy After Darwin*, pp.225-6)
[706] Michael Ruse, 'The View from Somewhere', in Michael Ruse, 2009, p.249. Ruse borrows the term 'evolutionary epistemology' from Donald Campbell to describe his position here.

It is clear that we humans have a cultural dimension, which if not unique, is very much more developed than anywhere else in the organic world; but this in no way implies that biology is irrelevant. Rather, 'culture in a sense sits on top of a bed of biological constraints and dispositions', Ruse asserts. As he puts it, 'culture is the flesh which adheres to the skeleton of biology.' The human mind is informed by various capacities, constraints, and dispositions, which come to us innately, Ruse claims, and we have these capacities or dispositions because it has proven biologically advantageous for our ancestors to have them. Culture works within the constraints put on us by these dispositions and 'expands out to the forms of thought and behaviour that we have.'[707] A growing body of evidence substantiates the existence of these innate dispositions, in humans as much as in other animals, but Ruse also maintains that *learning* and *culture* are crucially important.[708]

Again in another recent article, Ruse takes the argument further and attempts to show how ethics can be 'grounded' in evolutionary thought.[709] In evolutionary terms, morality is no more – although no less – than an adaptation. But since most moral decisions are 'much more low key for most of us most of the time', this also means that *morality*, in the sense of *normative ethics*, is commonplace in our species. Ruse agrees with Wilson that we are in many respects self-centred, and that nature has made us that way or we would never survive and reproduce. But because 'we have taken the route of sociality, we need a mechanism to make us break through that self-centered nature', arguing that evolution has given us 'this logically odd sense of oughtness' to do precisely that. This is how, in order to make us 'altruists' in the metaphorical, biological sense, 'biology has made us altruists in the literal, moral sense.' This does not refute either modern-day Social Contract theories or modern-day versions of Darwinism; both have their roots in eighteenth-century political thought,

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[707] *Ibid*, p.250
[708] That the term 'epigenetics' is now in common use in evolutionary psychology is shown by a very recent review of a book entitled *The Genius in All of Us: A new science of genes, talent and human potential*, by David Shenk, a psychologist at the University of Manitoba, in Canada. The review, which appeared in the 27 March, 2010 issue of *New Scientist*, quotes Shenk as he relates the outcome of an experiment performed with rats in normal and restricted environments, and then extrapolates from the results to people. He explains how 'our epigenome can be altered by our environment' adding that '[T]he problem is that epigenetic studies have, so far, only proved that environmental factors like malnutrition or smoking can have a damaging effect on the health of future generations. It has not been demonstrated that improvements in intelligence in one generation will be passed on, but it is an interesting thought.'
[709] Michael Ruse, 2009, 'Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach', p.500

and Ruse believes that 'they both work, in their respective domains.'[710]

Most moral systems, religious and secular, Christianity, Kantianism, probably utilitarianism, succeed in some cases and fail in others, and where there are points of conflict, Ruse thinks that perhaps 'this tells us something about morality itself', for it could just be that there are some problems for which there are no proper moral solutions. This is one of the main arguments that this thesis, in the same spirit suggested by Williams, and continued in both Appiah and Chappell, has been attempting to elaborate, in the belief that the only moral position that we human beings can be ultimately responsible for is our own, which in turn gives us reason to focus on the *ethical outlook* that was put forward in our introduction as the central notion that can enable us to lead a morally good life in our contemporary society.

Perhaps we too could then adopt what Ruse describes as 'ethical skepticism', with regard to the *foundations*, but *not* the *prescriptions* of ethics. 'Normative ethics', as a biological adaptation, can be seen to have *no being or reality* beyond this. We *need* to believe in morality, and so, thanks to our biology, we *do* believe in morality. There is no foundation "out there", beyond human nature, Ruse tells us. Nevertheless, there are good reasons *why* we would believe in normative ethics, whether it has independent existence or not. Moral choice comes into our actions whether or not we obey the rules of morality, not whether we choose the rules themselves. Recalling how Hume regarded ethics as a *subjective* phenomena, while at the same time seeing the significance of reciprocation in human relationships, Ruse suggests that it may be possible to see 'the psychological phenomenon of objectification' like Hume did, as 'a major element in the ethical experience.'[711] This is a point that Appiah has comprehensively discussed in a similar conclusion, as we have seen.

Before returning to the question of the role of *biology* and evolution in any attempts to explain and justify human morality, a question that has preoccupied many other thinkers to date, perhaps a glimpse of some of the landmark philosophical and scientific findings that have given us a better understanding of the role of consciousness and its emergence in the human brain will serve to fill in the account of

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[710] *Ibid*, p.500-2
[711] *Ibid*, pp.503-8

how we come to think of ourselves as conscious and rational beings.

6.4   Human traits and capacities in the light of biological and cultural evolution

A human mind in a biological brain

The phenomenon of our subjective experience has long engaged scientific and philosophical thought since Descartes, but many of the advances around the middle of the twentieth century confronted 'the mind/body problem' in more naturalistic terms.[712] The study of the subjective elements of consciousness continues in the work of a younger generation, best represented by David Chalmers,[713] which follows in the materialist philosophical tradition that challenged the separateness of mind and brain by asserting that mind *is* equivalent to brain, and that it is in the brain that we should look for an explanation of our mental processes. Cognitive science, neurobiology and evolutionary biology have since been developing this tradition, with different studies that investigate how consciousness operates in our minds, often by comparing its normal function to that of unconscious or impaired brain states.

A better understanding of how the human mind works and what enables human consciousness to emerge is also the subject of Steven Pinker's 1997 extensive exploration.[714] In it, Pinker observes how *evolutionary psychology* brought together in a powerful combination the cognitive revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, which explains 'the mechanics of thought and emotion in terms of information and

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[712]Around then, a group of Australian philosophers working on this problem included John Smart, David Armstrong, and Ullin Place, the generation of 'Oxford renegades' - so called because they began to formulate their theories as students in the 1959 at Oxford, in the UK. Introduced in this manner in the ABC Radio interview, these philosophers were gathered to discuss 'The mind-body problem Down Under' (ABC Radio National, 'All in the Mind', first broadcast on 23 September 2006, repeated on 3 February 2007). At the time, John (Jack) J.C. Smart was Emeritus Professor of the Department of Philosophy at the Australian National University and an Honorary Research Associate at Monash University's Department of Philosophy and David M. Armstrong, Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney. In his 1959 paper, John Smart put forward what became known as the Mind-brain Identity theory, which holds to a belief in materialism as an explanation of all human behaviour. (J.C. Smart, 1959, 'Sensations and Brain Processes', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 2, pp. 141-156)

[713] David Chalmers, a Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Centre of Consciousness Studies at the ANU in Canberra, first worked with cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter's research group in philosophy and cognitive science, and his particular view of the subjective elements of consciousness, since then defined as the 'hard problem', is developed in *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

[714] Steven Pinker, 1997, *How the Mind Works*, Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Vic.

computation' and the revolution in evolutionary biology of the 1960s and 1970s, which explains 'the complex adaptive design of living things in terms of selection among replicators.' Cognitive science helps us understand *how* a mind is possible and *what* kind of mind we have, while evolutionary biology helps us to understand *why* we have the kind of mind we have.[715]

Pinker's endorsement of evolutionary psychology, a move that sparked some heated critical reactions, is made clear in the opening section of the book,[716] while he also credits in his Preface anthropologist John Tooby and psychologist Leda Cosmides for forging the synthesis that inspired him to write it.[717] Underlying Pinker's analysis are its basic premises, based on what we know about our 'human nature', as evidenced by evolutionary biology: 'We *are* naked, lopsided apes that speak, but we also have minds that differ considerably from those of apes', and these differences we owe to the large size of our brain, which developed in modern humans as an extraordinary adaptation. None of the impressive cognitive abilities in humans is therefore incompatible with the theory of evolution. Natural selection introduces differences into descendants by fitting them with specialisations that adapt them to different niches, though not all behaviour is adaptive in Darwin's sense, as selection operates over thousands of generations. Our minds are designed to generate behaviour that would have been adaptive, on average, in our ancestral environment, but any particular deed done today, Pinker explains, is the effect of dozens of causes. Behaviour is the outcome of an internal struggle among many mental modules, and 'it is played out on the chessboard of opportunities and constraints defined by other people's behaviour.'[718]

Like Singer, Pinker also believes that 'the debate over human nature has been

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[715] *Ibid*, 'Standard Equipment', p.23
[716] Pinker opens the book with a series of pronouncements that make his premises clear: 'The evolutionary psychology of this book is, in one sense, a straightforward extension of biology, focusing on one organ, the mind, of one species, *Homo sapiens*. But in another sense it is a radical thesis that discards the way issues about the mind have been framed for almost a century. […] The mind is a set of modules, but the modules are not encapsulated boxes or circumscribed swatches on the surface of the brain. The organization of our mental modules comes from our genetic program, but that does not mean that there is a gene for every trait or that learning is less important than we used to think. The mind is an adaptation designed by natural selection, but that does not mean that everything we think, feel, and do is biologically adaptive. We evolved from apes, but that does not mean we have the same minds as apes. And the ultimate goal of natural selection is to propagate genes, but that does not mean that the ultimate goal of people is to propagate genes.' (Steven Pinker, 1997, pp.23-4)
[717] *Ibid*, 'Preface', p.x
[718] *Ibid*, pp.40-2

muddied by an intellectual laziness', since in most discussions of 'human nature' there is a tendency to simply equate 'innate' with 'right-wing', and therefore conclude that it is bad. A denial of 'human nature', no less than an emphasis on it, says Pinker, can be warped to serve harmful ends, and we should therefore expose 'whatever ends are harmful and whatever ideas are false and not confuse the two.'[719]

The supposed implications of the term 'an innate human nature' will be found to be nonexistent once we understand it as simply meaning 'innate human differences', Pinker suggests. The 'mental machinery 'is installed in every neurologically normal human being, and the differences among people may have nothing to do with the design of that machinery; they could very well come from *random variations* in the assembly process or from different life histories. Even if the differences were innate, there could be quantitative variations and minor quirks 'in equipment' present in all of us. Thus a *universal structure* to the mind is, he concludes, not only 'logically possible but likely to be true.'[720]

Pinker's model of 'a module-packed mind' allows both for innate motives that lead to evil acts and for those that can avert them. Arguing that nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live our lives, he stresses that happiness and virtue have nothing to do with what natural selection designed us to accomplish in the ancestral environment. Science and ethics are for Pinker 'two self-contained systems played out among the same entities in the world.' Thus:

The science game treats people as material objects, and its rules are the physical processes that cause behavior through natural selection and neurophysiology. The ethics game treats people as equivalent, sentient, rational, free-willed agents, and its rules are the calculus that assigns moral value to behavior through the behavior's inherent nature or its consequences.[721]

Free will is therefore 'an idealization of human beings that makes the ethics game playable.' Ethical theory requires idealisations, and as long as there is no outright coercion or gross malfunction of reasoning, the world is close enough to the idealisation of free will that moral theory can meaningfully be applied to it. Science

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[719] *Ibid*, pp.47-8
[720] *Ibid*, pp.48-9
[721] *Ibid*, p.55

and morality are thus *separate spheres of reasoning*, and 'only by recognising them as separate can we have them both.' A human being is 'simultaneously a machine and a sentient free agent', depending on the purpose of the discussion. The mechanistic stance that Pinker adopts can thus be seen as a metaphor that allows us to understand 'what makes us tick and how we fit into the physical universe.' When those discussions 'wind down for the day', Pinker concludes, 'we go back to talking about each other as free and dignified human beings.'[722]

Evolutionary psychology: renewing an old debate

In 2001, perhaps in response to Pinker, and also to the pioneering work of Tooby and Cosmides[723] among others, a whole set of arguments against evolutionary psychology appeared in a collection of essays compiled by Steven and Hilary Rose, which revived some old antagonisms.[724] In this volume, the late evolutionary theorist and prolific science writer Stephen Jay Gould highlights the fact that, although Darwin knew that the complexities of evolution could not be fully rendered by any single cause, natural selection seems to figure centrally in the ideas of some biologists and philosophers - namely John Maynard Smith, Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett - whose 'constructionism' Gould associates with the 'ultra-Darwinism' of evolutionary psychology.[725]

Recent evidence from various interdisciplinary collaborations in the natural sciences, however, points to the fact that *natural selection* does deserve a central place as a mechanism that powers evolution, even though it is not taken to be the *only*

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[722] *Ibid*, p.56

[723] In 1992, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides wrote an article, 'The psychological foundations of culture' in which the authors presented what Matt Ridley has described as 'a subtle mixture of nature and nurture that studiously avoids putting the two in opposition to each other.' According to Ridley, Tooby and Cosmides focussed on the evolution of the whole development program, combining the idea of innate knowledge with the best of sociobiology's selectionism; the idea that 'the way to understand a part of the mind is to understand what natural selection designed it to do.' (John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, 1992, 'The Psychological Foundations of Culture', in *The Adapted Mind*, eds., J.H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, and J. Tooby, Oxford University Press, cited in Matt Ridley, 2003, 'The Seven Meanings of "Gene"', *Nature Via Nurture: Genes, Experience, and What Makes Us Human*, p.245).

[724] Steven Rose and Hilary Rose (eds.) 2001, *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, Vintage, Random House Australia (Pty) Limited, Sydney. The essays range from sociology to molecular biology, evolutionary theory, philosophy, cultural theory, anthropology, feminist theory, genetics and ethology.

[725] Stephen Jay Gould, 2001, 'More Things in Heaven and Earth', in Steven Rose and Hilary Rose (eds.), *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, pp.85-105

mechanism in such a process.[726] A recent paper by geneticist Francisco Ayala[727] best illustrates the long standing of this mechanism. In it, Ayala categorically declares:

Darwin's theory of natural selection accounts for the 'design' of organisms, and for their wondrous diversity, as the result of natural processes, the gradual accumulation of spontaneously arisen variations (mutations) sorted out by natural selection. Which characteristics will be selected depends on which variations happen to be present at a given time in a given place. This in turn depends on the random process of mutation as well as on the previous history of the organisms. Mutation and selection have jointly driven the marvellous process that, starting from microscopic organisms, has yielded orchids, birds, and humans. The theory of evolution conveys chance and necessity, randomness and determinism, jointly enmeshed in the stuff of life. This was Darwin's fundamental discovery, that there is a process that is creative, although not conscious.[728]

This thinking is reflected in the way these questions are now presented in many a tertiary course in biology,[729] and also suggests that the once discredited theory of

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[726] As will become clearer later in this section, most of the scientists and philosophers discussed below would agree with this statement, but one could equally point to some recent, randomly chosen research that focuses on natural selection and its unquestioned central role in evolution. In their joint paper, 'Phylogenomic evidence of adaptive evolution in the ancestry of humans', Morris Goodman and Kirstin N. Sterner, from the Center for Molecular Medicine and Genetics and the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology of Wayne State University School of Medicine, note that 'Expanded cognitive abilities are hallmarks of modern humans. Why such abilities were selected for in modern humans and in the human lineage, and how they are maintained, is of great interest.' Their findings suggest that the human brain might be different by degree, and not by kind from that of other primates, which leads them to conclude that 'As we work toward a more complete understanding of genome structure, biology, and evolution, we become better able to develop and test hypotheses concerning a number of fundamental questions in evolutionary biology and human evolution.' (Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America, May 11, 2010, Vol. 107, no. suppl.2, pp.8918-23). Another paper, resulting from the Arthur M. Sackler Colloquium of the NAS, 'Evolution in Health and Medicine', held on April 2-3, 2009, is entitled 'Natural selection in a contemporary human population.' Its authors, Sean G. Byars, Douglas Ewbank, Diddahally R. Govindaraju, and Stephen C. Stearns, from the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Yale University, New Haven, CT., the Population Studies Center of the University of Pennsylvania, PA., and the Department of Neurology, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, MA., unequivocally declare: 'Our aims were to demonstrate that natural selection is operating on contemporary humans, predict future evolutionary change for specific traits with medical significance, and show that for some traits we can make short-term predictions about our future evolution. To do so, we measured the strength of selection, estimated genetic variation and covariation, and predicted the response to selection for women in the Framingham Heart Study, a project of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and Boston University that began in 1948. We found that natural selection is acting to cause slow, gradual evolutionary change.' After describing the predicted changes identified in their research, they also conclude: 'To better understand and predict such changes, the design of planned large, long-term, multicohort studies should include input from evolutionary biologists.' (PNAS, January 26, 2010, Vol. 107, no. suppl. 1, pp.1787-92)
[727] Francisco J. Ayala, 2007, 'Darwin's greatest discovery: Design without designer', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America*, May 15, 2007, Vol. 104, no. suppl.1, pp.8567-73. This paper was first presented at the Arthur M. Sackler Colloquium of the National Academy of Sciences, 'In the Light of Evolution I: Adaptation and Complex Design', held on December 1-2, 2006 at the Arnold and and Mabel Beckman Center of the National Academies of Sciences and Engineering in Irvine, California. Ayala was at the time at the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology of the University of California, Irvine.
[728] Francisco J. Ayala, 2007, 'Abstract', 'Darwin's greatest discovery: Design without designer', PNAS, p.8567.
[729] 'Understanding Evolution' is a good example of this trend. An online Introductory course ('Welcome to Evolution 101!'), it was devised by the University of California Museum of Paleontology, with support provided by the National Science Foundation and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. It provides up to date, clearly presented information and appealing graphics, covering most relevant issues in evolutionary theory and the mechanisms, from definitions to details, involved in natural selection and genetic drift, and those from mutations

'saltations' that Lamarck had put forward is currently regarded as a likely mechanism that accompanies evolution, as Darwin himself had allowed. In his original Introduction to the first edition of *The Origin of Species*, which John Burrow has preserved unchanged, as its later editor and commentator, Darwin had unambiguously put forward natural selection 'as the main but not exclusive means of modification.'[730]

Gould was right to say that evolution is a complex process, and we know that Darwin was already concerned in his work with explaining how natural selection occurs in such a process.[731] This particular explanation contains the main elements of Darwin's theory, with the now widely accepted description of how *variation* underlies change, and how this change is *adaptive*, even though it happens slowly over time, through *modification*; what is now understood as 'descent with modification.' All organic beings, humans included, Darwin added, occupy a place 'in the economy of nature', and if the organism is not adapted to its environment, it will soon be 'exterminated.' Extinction, in other words, is concomitant with species variation, which in turn is the result of individual modification. This variation is only possible, as Darwin had explained before, through the 'intercrossing' of individuals, in plants as well as animals; in other words, through *sexual reproduction*.[732]

The tendency to variation in offspring could only be explained by such variations

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to punctuated equilibrium. The 'big issues' section covers 'the pace of evolution', which deals precisely with the question of whether evolution occurred in 'quick jumps', or slowly, through Lamarckian 'saltations', with transitional forms accounting for the latter view. (See http://evolution.berkely.edu/evolibrary)

[730] Charles Darwin, 1859, 'Introduction', *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.69. Darwin wrote this as a recapitulation of his theory, in the final paragraph, which reads: 'I am fully convinced that species are not immutable; but that those belonging to what are called the same genera are lineal descendants of some other and generally extinct species, in the same manner as we acknowledged varieties of any one species are the descendants of that species. Furthermore, I am convinced that Natural Selection has been the main but not exclusive means of modification.' It is also worth noticing that here the term 'Natural Selection' is capitalised. In the Note to this edition of Darwin's work by its contemporary editor and commentator, John Burrow, we learn that, apart from its unique historical interest, this first edition also 'presents in many ways a more clear-cut and forceful version of Darwin's theory than the later editions' in which Darwin apparently weakened his argument and made other concessions in an attempt to meet the criticisms that were levelled during his time. Burrow wrote the illuminating Introduction to the Penguin Books first and subsequent editions, and at the time of the 1985 reprint, he was Professor of Intellectual History at the University of Sussex, England. (See John Burrow, 1985, 'Note on this Edition', in Charles Darwin, 1859, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, p.49)

[731] Charles Darwin, 1859, Chapter IV, 'Natural Selection', *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.147

[732] This is how Darwin describes how he arrived at such understanding, from his experience with domestic breeding: '…I have collected so large a body of facts, showing, in accordance with the almost universal belief of breeders, that with animals and plants a cross between different varieties, or between individuals of the same variety but of another strain, gives vigour and fertility to the offspring; and on the other hand, that *close* interbreeding diminishes vigour and fertility; that these facts alone incline me to believe that it is a general law of nature (utterly ignorant though we be of the meaning of the law) that no organic being self-fertilises itself for an eternity of generations; but that a cross with another individual is occasionally – perhaps at very long intervals – indispensable.' (Charles Darwin, 1859, Chapter IV, 'Natural Selection', p.143)

occurring and being heritable so that natural selection, as Burrow remarks, 'can have anything to select.' Darwin was writing, as we know, before the science of genetics existed, and he admitted that 'our ignorance of the laws of variation is profound.' Nevertheless, he remained convinced that compared with other possible factors, the chief source of variation lay in the process of reproduction – a view which subsequent work has now definitely confirmed.[733]

Discussing the conditions in which natural selection occurs, Darwin had also emphasised the extreme slowness of its operation.[734] Gould, speaking from his own field as a palaeontologist, always believed that 'punctuated equilibrium' offers a better explanation than natural selection in accounting for the extended stability of most species, and the branching off of new species in geological moments. Punctuated equilibrium explains long-term evolutionary trends as 'the distinctive success of some species versus others, and not as a gradual accumulation of adaptations generated by organisms within a continuously evolving population.' The causes of a population's branching can rarely be reduced to the adaptive improvement of its individual organisms, Gould remarked, citing the study of mass extinctions (like that of the dinosaurs) as further evidence that adaptation may bear no relationship to success over immensely long periods of geological time.[735]

Regarding the claim of evolutionary psychology to a common biological heritage, Gould saw it only as a continuation of 'the old strategy of finding an adaptationist narrative (often in the purely speculative or story-telling mode) to account for genetic differences built by natural selection.' One particular kind of difference worried Gould, the one based on 'the putative evolutionary reasons for supposedly universal behavioural differences between males and females.' This has also been a focus of attention by feminist critics, as some have read in the research that has flowed from this claim an implicit reinforcement of patriarchal behaviour and gender stereotypes.

Gould's argument against adaptation was primarily based on the impossibility to

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[733] John Burrow, 1985, 'Editor's Introduction', Charles Darwin, 1859, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., p.37
[734] Charles Darwin, 1859, Chapter IV, 'Natural Selection', *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Penguin Books Ltd., pp.152-3
[735] Stephen Jay Gould, 2001, 'More Things in Heaven and Earth', in Steven Rose and Hilary Rose, 2001, p.90. ('Understanding Evolution', the online Introductory course referred to previously further elucidates these issues).

know in detail the original environment of our ancestors; if they moved about, or whether environments varied through years and centuries. He thus wondered about such things, as for example:

… relations of kinship, social structures and sizes of groups, different activities of males and females, the roles of religion, symbolising, story-telling and a hundred other central aspects of human life that cannot be traced in fossils.[736]

These are not unreasonable questions, and on the face of Gould's objections, would seem to have some credibility. But whether the 'adaptationist premise is the fatal flaw of evolutionary psychology in its current form', as Gould thought, is yet to be seen.[737] Regarding the Darwinian principle of differential parental investment, Gould argued that while it is probable that it underlies 'some different, and broadly general, emotional propensities of human males and females', this principle could not explain 'the full panoply of supposed sexual differences' as a result of a specifically selected Darwinian adaptation for reproductive success.[738]

Gould's arguments led him to conclude that human *cultural change* cannot be basically Darwinian at all, but that it rather operates 'fundamentally in the Lamarckian mode, while *genetic evolution* remains firmly Darwinian.' And since Lamarckian and Darwinian systems work so differently, 'cultural change', he argued, will receive only limited (and metaphorical) illumination from Darwinism.'[739]

It is perhaps easy to read extremist positions into claims that many of their originators would only advance at best as strong probabilities, given the data available at the time. As to the question whether human *learned traits* and characteristics can be explained by developmental biology alone, as Mary Midgley[740] and other contributors

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[736] Stephen Jay Gould, 2001, 'More Things in Heaven and Earth', in Steven Rose and Hilary Rose, pp.100-01
[737] *Ibid,* p.91. Gould criticises Daniel Dennett for denigrating the importance of non-adaptive side consequences of evolutionary change, the 'spandrels' which with some reason, Gould saw as by products that may later be co-opted by organisms for useful purposes. His view of *Darwin's Dangerous Ideas*, Dennett's 1995 book, as a 'philosophical manifesto of pure adaptationism' might not be so easily justified, in the light of current research. Refering to this work, Gould says that while Dennett explains 'the strict adaptationist view well enough', he defends 'a blinkered picture of evolution in assuming that all important phenomena can be explained thereby.'
[738] *Ibid*, pp.101-3
[739] *Ibid*, pp.103-5
[740] Mary Midgley, 2001, 'Why Memes?', in Steven Rose and Hilary Rose, 2001, pp.67-84. This essay questions Richard Dawkin's 'meme theory' and also Dennett's and Susan Blackmore's endorsement of it (with some reason, one could perhaps add, as the usefulness of this notion is yet to be demonstrated).

in the Roses collection suggest, Matt Ridley had this to say:

There is nothing factually wrong with arguing that human beings are capable of learning, or being conditioned to associate stimuli, or reacting to reward and punishment or any other aspect of learning theory. These are facts and vital bricks in the wall I am building. But it does not follow that therefore human beings have no instincts, any more than it would follow that human beings are incapable of learning if they have instincts. Both can be true. The error is to be an either-or-person, to indulge in what the philosopher Mary Midgley calls 'nothing buttery.'[741]

The arguments for and against evolutionary biology in discussions of 'human nature' still seem to be with us today. John Burrow was deeply aware of the differing positions within the existing debate, as we read in the final paragraph of his Introduction:

Modern philosophical tools have done severe damage to attempts to reinstate evolution as the basis of ethics, while sociologists and social anthropologists have generally repudiated as too sweeping the social evolutionary schemes of their predecessors. [...][742]

At the same time, it would be difficult to find any of the reputable scientists on either side of this particular (ideological?) fence disagreeing with the remarks that Steven and Hilary Rose made as they conclude the essay that also closes their book:

The evolutionary path that leads humans has produced organisms with profoundly plastic, adaptable brains/minds and ways of living. Humans have created societies, invented technologies and cultures. We, the inheritors of not merely the genes, but also the cultures and technologies of our forebears, are profoundly shaped by them in ways that make our future as individuals, societies and species radically unpredictable. In short, the biological nature of being human enables us to create individual lives and collective societies whose futures lie at least in part in our own hands.[743]

Our conscious will: a guide to our selves and to our morality

As a philosopher with a profound interest in human psychology, Daniel Dennett sees no contradiction between what evolutionary theories can reveal about human biology and our human capacity to act as free and moral beings. In his 2003 publication,

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[741] Matt Ridley, 2003, 'Learning Lessons', *Nature Via Nurture: Genes, Experience, and What Makes Us Human*, p.189
[742] John Burrow, 1985, 'Editor's Introduction', Charles Darwin, 1859, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, pp.46 and 48
[743] Seven Rose, 2001, 'Escaping Evolutionary Psychology', in Steven Rose and Hilary Rose, p.263

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Freedom Evolves,[744] Dennett draws on arguments from evolutionary biology, cognitive neuroscience and philosophy to show how humans have evolved to have a sense of agency that accounts for free will and morality. To what extent we are born 'good natured', as Frans de Waal believes, or 'crooked', as Kant thought, is an important empirical question.[745]

A theory that explains morality should be neutral as to whether our moral attitudes, habits, preferences, and proclivities are a product of *genes* or *culture*. The interplay between cultural and genetic transmission routes should be examined from such a perspective, in order to address any imputations of biological determinism. The social conditions, individual practices, and attitudes that anchor our moral agency, as analysed by the various findings of evolutionary theorists, Dennett observes, suggest that culture itself must obey the constraints of evolution by natural selection. And this, contrary to the dire warnings of some critics, 'does not subvert the ideals of morality', but it rather provides much-needed support.[746]

In a species like ours, with language and culture, Dennett believes that the complexities of social life generate 'a series of evolutionary arms races', from which agents emerge who exhibit key components of human morality:

…an interest in discovering conditions in which cooperation will flourish, sensitivity to punishment and threats, concern for reputation, high-level dispositions of self-manipulation that are designed to improve self-control in the face of temptation, and an ability to make commitments that are appreciable by others.[747]

Morality thus involves our *conscious will*. 'Illusory or not, conscious will is the person's guide to his or her own moral responsibility for action.'[748] It can be thought of as 'a guide to ourselves', since the process of self-description begins in earliest childhood, and we learn through life that what *we do* is what *we are*.[749] But just as

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[744] Daniel C. Dennett, 2003, *Freedom Evolves*, Viking Penguin, Penguin Putnam Inc., New York
[745] Dennett refers here to Kant's statement, which he quotes, to the effect that 'Out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made nothing entirely straight can be built' (Dennett, D. C., 2003, *Freedom Evolves*, p.190)
[746] *Ibid*, p.191
[747] *Ibid,* p.218
[748] Daniel C. Dennett, 2003, 'A Mind-writer's View', quoting Daniel Wegner, the author of *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, in *Freedom Evolves*, p.242
[749] *Ibid*, pp.253-55

importantly, *we know* that we are free to choose whatever course of action we decide upon, as Ruse and Pinker pointed out. We then also come to understand, that because our freedom is greater than that of other creatures, this heightened capacity carries moral implications. This is how Dennett too sees the evolutionary perspective as an indispensable ally in exploring questions of morality and meaning, ethics and freedom, and applying reason to the best and deepest human thought.

Consciousness: 'the key to a life examined'

The assumptions made by Dennett and Pinker regarding the conscious will underlying our sense of agency and morality are based on the proper functioning of all of the human mind's capacities, governed by a normal brain activity. Antonio Damasio's empirical work as a neuroscientist has greatly contributed to the understanding of brain structure and functioning. Damasio's long experience with patients whose brains have been impaired as a result of injury or other genetic conditions has led him to think of *consciousness* as the critical biological function that allows us to know, 'the feeling of what happens' in our deeply seated emotions. Our private emotions are a by-product of consciousness, but none of these personal states would ever be known to each of us without it. Pain, empathy, desire, any one of the subjective experiences that enable us to know the world and to know ourselves, we owe to our conscious mind. Consciousness is, in effect, as Damasio defines it:

… the key to a life examined, for better and for worse, our beginner's permit into knowing all about the hunger, the thirst, the tears, the laughter, the kicks, the punches, the flow of images we call thought, the feelings, the words, the stories, the beliefs, the music and the poetry, the happiness and the ecstasy. At the simplest and most basic level, consciousness lets us recognise an irresistible urge to stay alive and develop a concern for the self. At its most complex and elaborate level, consciousness helps us develop a concern for other selves and improve the art of life.[750]

The power of consciousness, in Damasio's view, is an organism's *awareness of its own self* and its surroundings. This awareness of awareness is 'a turning point in the long history of life', aided by human evolution. We can easily envision how consciousness is likely to have opened the way to many human creations, such as

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[750] Antonio Damasio, 2000, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness,* Vintage, The Random House Group Limited, p.5

conscience, religion, social and political organisations, the arts, the sciences and technology. Perhaps even more compellingly, we realise that consciousness is 'the critical biological function that allows us to know sorrow or know joy, to know suffering or know pleasure, to sense embarrassment or pride, to grieve for lost love or lost life.[751]

The basic level of this biological function, *core consciousness*, provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment, now, and about one place, here. It 'does not illuminate the future', and the only past it vaguely lets us glimpse is that which occurred in the instant just before. *Extended consciousness*, on the other hand, provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self, an identity. It places that person 'at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it.' The difference between these two functions is further explained by Damasio:

In short, core consciousness is a simple, biological phenomenon, it has one single level of organization; it is stable across the lifetime of the organism; it is not exclusively human; and it is not dependent on conventional memory, working memory, reasoning, or language. On the other hand, extended consciousness is a complex biological phenomenon; it has several levels of organization; and it evolves across the lifetime of the organism. Although I believe extended consciousness is also present in nonhumans, at simple levels, it only attains its highest reaches in humans. It depends on conventional memory and working memory. When it attains its human peak, it is also enhanced by language.[752]

Extended consciousness at its zenith is what makes us distinctly human, and this full and more complex consciousness, enhanced by language, is in turn built on the foundations of core consciousness. This is how *the self*, in the act of knowing, can be said to constitute 'consciousness with a sense of self.'[753]

This particular perspective allows Damasio to look at the way that consciousness emerges in the brain without having to decide 'whether a certain cognitive function is shaped in a particular manner and in a particular individual by the genome, via its related biological constraints, or by the environment, via the influence of culture.'

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[751] *Ibid,* p.4. Damasio's more recent publication in 2010, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, (William Heinemann, London), further elaborates this idea.
[752] *Ibid*, p.16
[753] *Ibid*, p.19

Nevertheless, distinctions of this sort appear somewhat more possible, when we come to realise that 'virtually all of the machinery behind core consciousness and the generation of core self is under strong gene control.' Therefore, barring situations in which disease disrupts the brain structure early on, Damasio concludes that 'the genome puts in place the appropriate body-brain linkages, both neural and humoral; lays down the requisite circuits, and, with help from the environment, allows the machinery to perform in reliable fashion for an entire lifetime.'[754]

In his latest publication, Damasio continues to develop the idea that the *biological* and the *cultural* natures of human beings are thoroughly interrelated. There are broadly speaking, two kinds of homeostasis, the dynamic processes that regulate life; the first one can be understood as automated, beginning in unicellular living creatures, such as a bacterial cell or a simple amoeba, which do not have a brain but are capable of adaptive behaviour. As this process continues its march, it generates both behaviour and mind, and Damasio believes that whenever brains begin to generate 'primordial feelings', which would be quite early in evolutionary history, organisms acquire an early form of sentience. From there on, *an organised self process* could develop and be added to the mind, thereby providing the beginning of elaborate conscious minds, such as those in reptiles, birds, and of course, mammals. Humans have both core self and autobiographical self, as a number of mammals are also likely to have, but it is only in the conscious minds of humans that homeostasis takes 'an extraordinary leap' and 'acquires an extension into the sociocultural space.' Justice systems, economic and political organisation, the arts, medicine and technology, are examples of the new devices of regulation.[755]

Damasio further describes the 'awakening' that brings the self into being as the brain generates the human mind, emphasising the value of biological evolution in the history of humanity, and its mental and sociocultural achievements. As the mind increases in complexity, throughout the many biological changes and adaptations in human development, and expands its functions, it in turn expands the self processes, enlarging their scope. This is how, our conscious minds, armed with such complex

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[754] *Ibid,* pp.228-29
[755] Antonio Damasio, 2010, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, (William Heinemann, London), pp.25-26

selves and supported by even greater capabilities of memory, reasoning, and language, 'engender the instruments of culture and open the way into new means of homeostasis at the level of societies and culture.'[756]

The investigation of *sociocultural homeostasis* can be informed by psychology and neuroscience, but the native space of its phenomena is cultural. Both *basic homeostasis* (which is unconsciously guided) and *sociocultural homeostasis*, which is created and guided by our reflective conscious minds, operate as 'curators of biological value.' Separated by billions of years of evolution, these two varieties promote the same goal, 'the survival of living organisms – albeit in different ecological niches.' That goal is broadened, in the case of sociocultural homeostasis, to encompass the deliberate *seeking of well-being*, an important point that Damasio also puts forward in this work. Both varieties are in constant interaction; the basic variety is an established genetic inheritance, while the sociocultural variety is 'a somewhat fragile work in progress, responsible for much of human drama, folly, and hope.' There is growing evidence too, that over multiple generations, cultural developments lead to changes in the genome.[757]

That consciousness and emotion are not separable has been also acknowledged by Marvin Minsky, the founder of Artificial Intelligence, as he observed how emotions override mental activity when they activate in our brains.[758] And in a manner similar to Damasio, Patricia and Paul Churchland, the reputed philosophers who work at the boundaries of philosophy of mind and cognitive neuroscience, explain how the brain constructs models of the body, of the world external to the body, and of some activities of the brain itself.[759] This fundamental representation of causal interactions between the external world and the body 'anchors conscious self-representation', as

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[756] *Ibid*, p.26
[757] *Ibid*, p.27
[758] In a recent interview on his latest book, *The Emotion Machine,* Marvin Minsky challenged the traditional view of emotions as something additional to rational thought. Minsky views emotional reactions as important resources in our understanding of how human beings deal with problems. Emotional states are usually simpler than most of our other ways to think, but they tend to 'suppress' or override mental activity when they are active in our brains. This enables us to understand their apparent mystery. A Toshiba Professor of Media Arts and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Marvin Minsky co-founded MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. He is the acknowledged discipline's founding father. His eighth book, *The Emotion Machine*, was published by Simon & Shuster in 2007. (*New Scientist* Interview, 'Once more with feelings', 24 February 2007, pp.48-9)
[759] Patricia S. Churchland and Paul M. Churchland, 2002, 'Neural Worlds and Real Worlds', *Nature Reviews*, Vol. 3., November 2002, pp. 903-907

the Churchlands believe. The coherence and predictive power of representational models as the one the Churchlands propose is explained by *biological evolution* and by *empirical learning*: other things being equal, the better and faster the brain's predictive capacities relative to the organism's *modus vivendi*, the better the organism's behaviour that enables it to survive and reproduce, in a 'dynamic loop' that extracts information about the causal properties of the external world.[760] Such a dynamic loop would also seem to correspond to Damasio's characterisation of the interaction between our biology and the role of our mind's extended consciousness in the continuous expansion and stability of our sociocultural homeostasis.

Gerald Edelman, a Nobel laureate in physiology, and theoretical and experimental neurobiologist Giulio Tononi, conducted investigations that have similarly concluded that consciousness arises 'as a result of particular neural processes and of the interactions among the brain, the body and the world.'[761] Exploring the nature of conscious experience and its connection with human knowledge, they were also seeking a better understanding of different subjective states of consciousness, or 'qualia', in neural terms.[762] For Edelman and Tononi too, consciousness is a physical process embodied in each unique individual, which emerges in the complex system of the brain.[763] Their position, similar to Damasio's, is that 'high-order consciousness', which includes the ability to be *conscious of being conscious*, is dependent on the emergence of semantic capabilities and, ultimately, of language. And they too found that it is this process that enables the self to emerge:

Concomitant with these traits is the emergence of a true self, born of social interactions, along with concepts of the past and future. Driven by primary consciousness and the remembered present, we can, through symbolic exchange and higher-order consciousness, create narratives, fictions, and histories. We can ask questions about how we can know and thereby deliver our selves to the doorstep of

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[760] *Ibid*, pp .903-6
[761] Gerald M. Edelman and Giulio Tononi, 2001, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Camberwell, Victoria
[762] The intractability of finding a satisfactory scientific explanation for the consciousness phenomenon, even as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, is illustrated by a recent article, 'Consciousness, not yet explained', by Ray Tallis, a specialist in geriatric medicine at the University of Manchester, UK, involved in a major neuroscience project. In this article, published in the 9 January, 2010 edition of *New Scientist*, Tallis mentions the late Francis Crick, whose pioneering work with Christof Koch on a model for discovering the neural basis of consciousness paved the way for many other scientists and philosophers in this field. For Crick, as much as for those who continue his work, the question of the 'appearance of objects', or qualia, and the viewpoint of the conscious observer mattered greatly, and still point to the 'self-contradictory' nature of this puzzling task.
[763] Gerald .M Edelman and Giulio Tononi, 2001, 'Preface', p.xii

philosophy.[764]

The kind of consciousness that generates this *self-awareness* and enables our various capacities arises as a result of evolutionary innovations in the morphology of the brain and the body. The mind, arising from the body and its development is embodied, and part of nature, and mind and body are found to be in constant interaction. Language has enriched our conceptual abilities, and some of the products of that enrichment, logic and mathematics for example, 'transcend some of the phenotypic constraints on the embodied mind and remove some of the qualifications imposed on us by the limitations of our phenotype.' This is how consciousness constructs 'an informative scene' - the remembered present - that connects present reality to 'the past value-ridden history of each individual, conscious animal.'[765]

Value systems are necessary constraints on the workings of the brain as a selectional system, and this ties biologically based epistemology to the view that *emotions* are fundamental both to the origins of and the appetite for conscious thought. Further neuroscientific research on these systems and their modification by learning should shed light on 'the place of value in a world of facts', Edelman and Tononi suggest.[766] The material bases of mind do not contradict the conclusion 'that each mind is unique, not fully exhaustible by scientific means, and not a machine.' Material order and immaterial meaning are not only mutually consistent within a scientific framework, but live in a useful symbiosis.[767]

Our brain's capacity for 'representational universality' and moral empathy

Douglas Hofstadter's long career as a cognitive scientist, often in collaboration with Daniel Dennett, has often led him to wonder about consciousness and selfhood, as he did in many of his earlier writings, and notably in *Metamagical Themas: the Mind's I*, (co-edited with Dennett). His series of personal and philosophical reflections about 'what being human is all about', or in fact, what 'just-plain *being*' is about, as he writes in his latest book, is in a way a continuation of his many scientific and

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[764] *Ibid,* p.208
[765] *Ibid*, pp.216-18
[766] *Ibid*, p.218
[767] *Ibid*, p.220

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humanistic enquiries.[768] His latest contribution is intended to illuminate the structure and nature of our brain activity, adding a complementary perspective to those already discussed. Hofstadter, like Damasio, also thinks that meaning has evolved from the earliest 'proto-brains' as high-level physical structures representing abstract categories, and sees the patterns emerging in our brains as the symbols that helped us survive throughout human development. The brain activity that constitutes these symbolic arrangements is responsible for our concepts, meanings, desires and 'ultimately, our selves.'[769] Giving our brains the power to represent phenomena of unlimited complexity, they are also able 'to twist back and to engulf themselves via a strange loop that makes an "I" come seemingly out of nowhere.'[770]

This is Hofstadter's metaphorical way of explaining the *self-referential* manner in which, by mere fact of being alive, our brains accumulate experience, which then feeds back on itself, depositing layers and layers of valuable resources. These are the patterns of our lived experience that in turn are used by our selves to continue on their life's journey. This is the mechanism responsible for *our selfhood*, the creation of an 'I' that is continuous, and self-feeding, and at whose centre all sorts of ideas, beliefs, emotions, doubts, desires and longings are lodged. The 'strange loop' of our selfhood, with privileged direct access to its own patterns of experience, is also connected, by means of language and cultural traditions, to other 'strange loops' and their own privileged symbolic patterns. We are thus capable of internalising, copying or perceiving other living entities and experiencing vicariously what they are thinking or experiencing. We have the capacity to model inside ourselves representations of other beings, in other words, and to a certain extent to think and feel the way that they think and feel. We are in Hofstadter's view, 'universal beings', capable of 'representational universality.' And this may, significantly, lead to our *human empathy*, and by extension, our *ethics* and *morality*:

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[768] Douglas R. Hofstadter, 2007, 'Preface', *I am a Strange Loop,* Basic Books, New York, p.xix. In the Preface of the 20th anniversary edition of his 1980 *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid, A Metaphorical Fugue on Minds and Machines in the Spirit of Lewis Carroll*, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England), Hofstadter tells his readers that this particular volume was 'in essence a long proposal of strange loops as a metaphor for how selfhood originates, a metaphor by which to begin to grab a hold of just what it is that makes an "I" seem, at one and the same time, so terribly real and tangible to its own possessor, and yet also so vague, so impenetrable, so deeply elusive.' (Preface, p.xxv)
[769] Douglas R. Hofstadter, 2007, *I am a Strange Loop*, pp.194-96
[770] *Ibid*, p.204

…representational universality and the nearly insatiable hunger that it creates for vicarious experiences is but a stone's throw away from empathy, which I see as the most admirable quality of humanity. To 'be' someone else in a profound way is not merely to see the world intellectually as they see it and to feel rooted in the places and times that molded them as they grew up; it goes much further than that. It is to adopt their values, to take on their desires, to live their hopes, to feel their yearnings, to share their dreams, to shudder at their dreads, to participate in their life, to merge with their soul.[771]

The realisation of our 'representational universality' leads also to the inevitable conclusion that what seems to be the epitome of selfhood - a sense of 'I' - is in reality brought into being 'if and only if' along with that self there is a sense of '*other* selves with whom one has bonds of affection.'[772] Having a conscience, 'a sense of morality and of caring about doing "the right thing" towards other sentient beings' is moreover, Hofstadter believes, the most natural and 'hopefully also the most reliable sign of consciousness in a being.'[773]

Moral experience: 'the wellspring of our virtue'

Ursula Goodenough and Terrence W. Deacon have combined their expertise, the former as a cell and molecular biologist, and the latter as a linguist and biological anthropologist, to explore the *evolutionary antecedents of morality* in the context of the biological traits that undergird conscious awareness and our emergent forms of mind.[774] They too find a dynamic arising in the co-evolution of culture, language, and brain where our sense of self, our human self-awareness, is made possible by symbolic language. Like Damasio and Hofstadter, Goodenough and Deacon also believe that once language is in place, there emerges not only symbolic reference but also *symbolic self-reference*, in the sense that we humans experience that experience. What a person is and what a person is conscious of are representations, and although *nothing but* physical objects and events, representations are *something more* as well. Our very selves are thus 'emergent phenomena'; a locus of experience, feeling, and perceptual coming into being that is a person.[775]

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[771] *Ibid*, pp.246-47
[772] *Ibid*, p.354
[773] *Ibid*, p.349
[774] Ursula Goodenough and Terrence W. Deacon, 2003, 'From Biology to Consciousness to Morality', *Zygon,* vol.38, no.4 (December 2003), p.809
[775] *Ibid*, pp.812-13

Having evolved from an intensely social lineage, we are uniquely aware of what it feels like to be *prosocial*. It is this awareness of what it feels like to be moral that undergirds and motivates the actions of a moral person. Moral experience entails a coupling of our rich heritage of social orientation with our ability to represent it to ourselves symbolically, and what emerges during this coupling is 'a major augmentation of our social heritage.' Our capacity for conceptual blending allows us to synthesise moral understanding and emotional experiences, no longer constrained by evolutionary precedents and phylotypic stimuli. We are thus '*led to moral experience and insight*.' Real morality does not simply 'bubble up from beneath', nor is it imposed from the outside, but in each of us, it must be discovered anew. The discovery process may require great mental and emotional effort and may bloom only in the right climate, but human beings '*see* morality, recognize it, regardless of what it is that they want or need or love or hate or feel compelled to do.'[776]

We have the virtues neither by nor contrary to our nature, Aristotle wrote; we are 'fitted by our nature to receive them.' Four of the virtues that are common within the tradition that virtue ethics has continued to explore, humaneness (or compassion), fair-mindedness, care, and reverence, Goodenough and Deacon suggest, can be related to four of the *inherited prosocial capacities*: empathy, strategic reciprocity, nurture, and hierarchy.

Morality without empathy 'is oxymoronic', and humaneness and compassion describe the emergent way that we humans access, experience, and manifest the empathic nature inherent in us that enables us to articulate empathic connection even with such abstractions as 'life itself' or 'the planet Earth.' Fair-mindedness is a synthesis of humaneness and strategic reciprocity; 'it emerges as a sense of justice, a centrepiece of moral philosophy.' We can further articulate a sense of 'ecological justice' with this virtue too. Care is inherent in such concepts as responsibility, commitment, and kindness, and 'can be modelled as emerging from the strong primate sense of nurture', which entails not only protection and provisioning but also relationship, play, and affection. This transfigures as the capacity to care about one another, and about larger concepts, like ecosystems and future generations. Compassion and care

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[776] *Ibid*, pp.814-15

clearly overlap, but care is the more active notion and emerges from its own set of primate antecedents. Reverence, the fourth virtue, describes the capacity 'to carry the sense that we inhabit contexts that are larger and more important than ourselves, to which we accord awe, respect, and gratitude.' We orient ourselves in reverent family life and reverent communities, and offer honour to revered understandings in ceremony and ritual. Many find orientation in a theistic reverence, while others see it in the natural world, 'the emergent material world, in all its wondrous manifestations and evolutionary history.' Importantly, reverence also endows us with a sense of humility that allows us to ward off the perils of hubris.[777]

Aristotle's claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that 'virtuous conduct gives gladness to the lover of virtue' is another way to think about moral motivation, as is what Shaftesbury and Hume called *moral beauty*. Moral experience, in this sense, 'warms the heart', and witnessing it in others, we are uplifted; we find it meaningful. Moral experience is then 'the wellspring of our virtue', for we seek to act in accordance with the beauty of *the good*. Many of the insights and codifications that we find in cultural traditions, whether the golden rule, the categorical imperative, the veil of ignorance, the eightfold path, or similar ways to guide our conduct, robustly complement the understandings that are accessed during the process of moral self-discovery. In this way, culture encodes and presents to us moral ideals that guide our moral maturation and stimulate our moral motivation.[778]

The existence of self-interest, central as it is to the nature of all organisms, does not negate the existence of prosociality, since prosocial capacities are not just the absence of asocial capacities, but they 'have lives of their own.' Asocial behaviours are the default forms of behaviour of all creatures, and all primates, both nonhuman and human, most often engage in asocial behaviours when they are subjected to stress, particularly prolonged stress. One way 'to stack the deck in favour of morality' then, the authors maintain, is to ameliorate the conditions wherein humans find themselves 'physically or emotionally impoverished, threatened, defeated, abused, humiliated, lonely, or insecure', for such conditions foster the dehumanisation of those identified

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[777] *Ibid*, pp.815-16
[778] *Ibid,* p.817-18

as the cause of our frustrations, making them targets of exclusion and brutality.[779] *Moral experience* is not only something that we develop within ourselves; we also share this experience with one another; it binds us together. Our shared moral experiences generate a thirst for moral communities. Humaneness, fair-mindedness, care, and reverence can be considered cardinal virtues 'in the sense that a human community mindfully infused with these qualities can be described as a moral community.' Within these kinds of communities our emergent and most astonishing minds and selves can best flourish.[780]

6.5 Integrating perspectives for a holistic vision of the ethical self

Morality, reason and human emotions

Our extended consciousness, the product of our evolved brain, can now be seen as the most important phenomenon that emerged in humans to give us the distinctive awareness of our thoughts and emotions; the unique sense of selfhood that informs our actions and responses and whose complexity the recent collaborations of evolutionary biology, neuroscience, anthropology and other similarly allied disciplines are beginning to reveal. We know that these biological traits emerged as early as our ancestors first appeared in East Africa, around 200,000 years ago, enabling them to thrive and survive through the many changes and transformations in our external environment over the millennia of human history. The original impetus for migration might have been spurred by booming populations and food competition, or by climate change, but some scientists believe that genetic changes during the first wave of the 'Out of Africa' migration, around 100,000 years ago, increased human cognitive powers and may have led to the development of language.[781]

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[779] *Ibid,* p.819
[780] *Ibid*, p.818
[781] The population of early humans was probably never more than 100,000 individuals, but over many tens of thousands of years, migrations of small bands following the resources they relied upon for survival would have led some into southern Africa. Between 130,000 and 70,000 years ago, however, during the dawn of the last ice age, there was a climatic shift that turned the African savannah to desert in just a few thousand years. Southern populations were cut off from the east, and it was not until around 70,000 years ago that something seems to have happened that brought the human family back together. Anthropologists have called it the Great Leap Forward – the development of fully modern human behaviour. Tools became more complex, art made its appearance, and hunting methods became more efficient, perhaps in reaction to the unfavourable climatic conditions. This allowed the population to survive and prosper, and the expanding numbers bridged the great divide that had existed

Given what we have learned about our evolutionary past, it is legitimate to ask what can be said to have 'transcended' the phenotype of our original ancestors; what traits and characteristics of the human genome, or rather its *contemporary phenotypical expression*, can be regarded as evolutionary adaptations; whether any such traits can be seen as 'innate' or simply understood as a product of our biological development, or as an effect of social learning and cultural imitation. How much can be attributed to culture, biology, or environment; or whether one can or should ultimately keep any of these explanations apart, are questions that continue to engage anthropological geneticists as much as evolutionary biologists and psychologists, social scientists, and many a philosopher. Our current state of knowledge has not provided any conclusive answers to these matters, but neither has it stopped the passionate debate that continues to surround them.

As we keep pondering these questions and the more recent studies that explore them, we find three important publications, all appearing in the same year, 2006, which contribute their informed perspectives on our 'human nature' and its distinguishing traits, against the background of evolutionary theory. These are: *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*,[782] edited by Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober; Richard Joyce's *The Evolution of Morality*;[783] and the collection entitled *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, edited by Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna.[784]

Macedo and Ober's collection centres around the work of Frans de Waal, published

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between East and South. This expansion also led some of our African ancestors, beginning 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, to forge into the unknown terrains of Asia, and from there to spread all over the world. Genetic data indicate that the first great migration out of Africa was along Asia's southern coastline, through India and Southeast Asia and on to Australia – linking that continent's aboriginal people back to Africa within the last 50,000 years. Forty-five thousand years ago more descendants reached the Middle East, and 40,000 years ago they moved into the open steppes of Central Asia. From these plentiful steppes early humans multiplied and set out to populate much of the globe. Around 35,000 years ago they reached Europe. Some 20,000 years ago a separate group of Central Asians moved north into Siberia and the Arctic Circle. From there, perhaps 5,000 years later, they crossed into the Americas. (From the 2008 brochure 'A Landmark Study of the Human Journey', *The Genographic Project*, a collaborative undertaking of the National Geographic Society, IBM, and the Waitt Family Foundation, this is a five-year research partnership that seeks 'to chart new knowledge about the migratory history of the human species by using sophisticated laboratory and computer analysis of DNA contributed by hundreds of thousands of people from around the world.')

[782] Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.), *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

[783] Richard Joyce, 2007, *The Evolution of Morality*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. At the time of the book's original publication, in 2006, Richard Joyce had just joined the Philosophy Program at the Research School of the Social Sciences at the Australian National University as a Research Fellow.

[784] Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna, 2006, (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

on occasion of his Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton University in 2003, and includes the responses to some of the issues raised then by de Waal, by Robert Wright, Christine M. Korsgaard, Philip Kitcher and Peter Singer. The common ground that links the thinking of de Waal's commentators, three of them distinguished scholars in philosophy and one with an interest in evolutionary psychology, is their acceptance of the standard scientific account of biological evolution as based on random natural selection, as well as their belief that *moral goodness* is something real, about which it is possible to make truth claims. *Evolutionary science* and *moral reality* thus establish the boundaries of the debate about the *origins of goodness* as it is set forth in the book. The question that de Waal and his commentators seek to address is how humans come to be so strongly attached to the *value* of goodness, and if morality is real, how can we explain its reality, without resorting to theological assumptions.

De Waal's main concern is to counter the argument that morality is only a thin 'veneer' superimposed on an amoral or immoral human nature,[785] by a belief that humans are by nature good, and that our 'good nature' is inherited, along with much else, from our nonhuman ancestors through the ordinary Darwinian process of natural selection. Having developed his views on human morality on a long career observing and recording primate behaviour, de Waal sees primate nonhuman morality as the *foundation* of more complex human morality.[786] Emotional responses are for de Waal the 'building blocks' of human morality, and he judges human moral behaviour, although considerably more elaborate than that of any nonhuman animal, to be *continuous* with nonhuman behaviour. Citing several contemporary studies on emotion in humans, de Waal, like Wilson and Ruse, but also Damasio and other similarly inspired scientists, argues that with increasing differentiation between *self* and *other*, our capacity for *empathy* encompasses 'emotional contagion', but goes beyond it. In the affective response that enables humans to feel sorrow or concern for 'a distressed or needy other', de Waal sees an other-oriented, *altruistic motivation*,

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[785] De Waal sees this argument beginning with Thomas Huxley and continued in some social contract theorists, notably Hobbes. He in fact begins his introductory essay in Macedo and Ober's collection with the ancient Roman proverb, '*Homo homini lupus*' – 'man is wolf to man', which was apparently popularised by Thomas Hobbes. (de Waal, 'Morally Evolved: Primate Social Instincts, Human Morality, and the Rise and Fall of "Veneer Theory"', in Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.), *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, p.3)
[786] These views are extensively discussed in the 'Introduction' by Josiah Ober and Stephen Macedo, and in Part I, 'Morally Evolved: Primate Social Instincts, Human Morality, and the Rise and Fall of "Veneer Theory"', including Appendix A, B and C, written by Frans de Waal in this work.

concluding that there is a tight relation in human behaviour between 'empathy and sympathy', and their expression in 'psychological altruism.'[787]

Robert Wright agrees that our moral judgments, though seemingly reached through a conscious and rational process of deliberation, can be biased subtly by emotional factors, but he would rather argue for a 'naturalistic veneer theory' that sees humans covering self-serving motives with a moralistic veneer which is itself *genetically*, not *just culturally grounded.*[788] Whereas Wright's reasoning is also reminiscent of Wilson and Ruse, Christine Korsgaard opts for a distinction between our nearest nonhuman relatives and our own human capacity 'for *normative self-government*', or as Kant called it, 'autonomy', claiming that it is at this level that morality emerges, not as a function of the content of one's intentions - an argument that is reminiscent of Lorenz's naturalistic belief in the organic capabilities of human beings, always reaching for self-realisation and autonomy. Believing that the capacity for autonomy is characteristic of and probably unique to human beings, Korsgaard also ponders the question, which she regards as empirical at present, of how far in the animal kingdom that capacity extends.[789]

Kitcher, like Korsgaard, similarly distinguishes animal behaviour motivated by emotion from human morality, which he too argues must be based on *cognitive self-consciousness* about the propriety of one's actions. He goes back to Hume's identification with 'the party of humanity', with humans displaying the capacity for refining our dispositions to respond to our kin and friends through proper immersion in society, thereby expanding our sympathies to the point of being moved by what is 'useful and agreeable' to others. And yet, Kitcher finds Smith's call to adopt *reflection*, in the 'the stance of the impartial spectator', more explicit than Hume's arguments in explaining how this 'enlargement of sympathy' should proceed. Smith's proposal is also more valuable for directing moral behaviour, particularly in situations of conflict, as Kitcher has argued throughout his work.[790]

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[787] Frans de Waal, 2006, 'Morally Evolved', pp.26-28
[788] Robert Wright, 2006, 'The Uses of Anthropomorphism', in Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.) pp.95-7
[789] Christine M. Korsgaard, 2006, 'Morality and the Distinctiveness of Human Action', in Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.), pp.112-3
[790] Philip Kitcher, 2006, 'Ethics and Evolution: How to Get Here from There', in Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.), pp.132-4

In 2005, Singer, like Ruse and Pinker, also wrote that our biology 'does not prescribe the specific forms our morality takes.'[791] With the accepted background understanding of the *origins* of morality in the evolutionary processes of natural selection, Singer explored the cultural variations found in human morality, and the role of *emotions* and *reason* in making moral decisions and guiding human behaviour. He had at the time referred to some studies of the conscious mind that highlight the importance of the proper functioning of the higher-order processes underlying brain activity, citing Damasio's findings, as well as other studies by psychologists and cognitive scientists with a particular interest in human evolution and its implications for human behaviour and morality. In *Primates and Philosophers*, Singer refers again to this innovative work and to the interpretation from these studies, with which De Waal was also familiar. While De Waal believed that neuroscience seems to be 'lending support to human morality as evolutionarily anchored in mammalian sociality', Singer thought that only *some* of the emotional responses documented by these scientists can be explained in the evolutionary terms that de Waal suggests. The judgements shown to be made *after some reflection* in the subjects in those studies - particularly in Haidt's and Greene's[792] - can be seen to arise not from the common evolutionary heritage we share with other social mammals, Singer argued, but rather from our '*capacity to reason*.' Unlike the other social mammals, Singer highlights this important difference, which in humans means that insofar as *we can reflect* on our emotional responses, we can also *choose* to reject them. We may do this on the basis

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[791] Peter Singer, 2005, 'Ethics and Intuitions', *Journal of Ethics* 9, pp.331-52, reproduced in Part VI, 'The Evolution of Altruism', Michael Ruse, 2009, (ed.), *Philosophy After Darwin*, p.479

[792] The studies conducted by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt involved moral judgements in brain areas, which contrasted the outcome of quick, almost automatic, intuitive responses, with the more deliberate, conscious reasoning that tends to come after the intuitive response, as a 'a rationalization of that response, rather than the basis for the moral judgment.' (Jonathan Haidt, 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment', quoted in Peter Singer, 2005, 'Ethics and Intuitions', in Michael Ruse, 2009 (ed.), pp.480-2). Singer also cited in this work Damasio's 1994 findings with patients with damage to the ventromedial portion of the frontal lobes, who showed a tendency to anti-social behaviour, as well as similar experiments by moral psychologist Joshua Greene and others, which focussed on the different emotional responses shown by people in a set of personal and impersonal variations on the 'trolley problem.' (Most of the 'trolley problem' experiments involve confronting subjects with scenarios where they are asked to choose between saving one person at the expense of harming others. The classic form of these has the stranger standing in front of a trolley heading directly towards him/her and others, or on the platform of an incoming train, and so on, and the subject is either asked whether they would physically intervene to push the one stranger off the platform or pull on a lever, switch, etc., in order to avert an imminent accident and avoid others being killed.) In the case of 'personal' violations in most of these laboratory scenarios, there was found to be increased activity in areas of the brain associated with the emotions, whereas in judgements involving relatively 'impersonal' violations, the activity in those areas was found to be less. (Joshua D. Greene, 2002, 'The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Truth About Morality, and What to Do About It', Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Philosophy, Princeton University).

of other emotional responses, but the process involves *reason* and *abstraction*.[793] Singer therefore concludes that Kant was not so obviously wrong as de Waal suggests, and neither was Dawkins, as he wrote in his last comment in *The Selfish Gene* that 'We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.' The issue is not so much whether we accept the 'veneer theory' of morality, but rather 'how much of morality is veneer, and how much is underlying structure.' Those who claim that all of morality is 'a veneer laid over a basically individualistic, selfish human nature' are mistaken. Yet a morality that goes beyond our own group and shows impartial concern for all human beings, Singer claims here, as he had done in his earlier work, might well be seen 'as a veneer over the nature we share with other social mammals.'[794]

Delving further into the 'innateness' of morality

Richard Joyce's work, the other important contribution to this debate, focuses on the question of whether human morality is 'innate' and what possible implications could flow is this proves to be the case. The term '*innateness of morality*', Joyce says, can be seen to ask whether 'morality (under some specification) can be given an adaptive explanation in genetic terms'; that is, whether the present-day existence of the trait is to be explained by reference to a genotype having granted our ancestors reproductive advantage. This does not mean that an innate trait will develop irrespective of the environment or even that it is 'highly canalized.' It does not follow either that there is a 'gene for morality', or that the references to 'human nature' that routinely come with this conception of innateness imply any dubious metaphysics regarding a human essence.[795]

The hypothesis that humans are by nature *moral animals* may be understood as meaning that evolution has designed us to think in moral terms; that biological natural

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[793] Peter Singer, 2006, 'Morality, Reason, and the Rights of Animals', in Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, 2006, (eds.), pp.145-50.

[794] *Ibid*, pp.150-1. Singer was already exploring his ongoing concerns with the link between human biology, evolution, and ethics, as mentioned earlier, in his 1981 book, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology*. He continues to call for an integration of the knowledge derived from science to better understand the nature of morality, having more recently collaborated in an Opinion Special article in the 16.10.2010 edition of *New Scientist* entitled 'Science Wakes up to Morality' (pp.41-49), where we also find philosopher Patricia Churchland's contribution, among those of other experimental philosophers and neuroscientists.

[795] Richard Joyce, 2007, 'Human Nature', *The Evolution of Morality*, pp.2-3.

selection has conferred upon us the tendency to employ moral concepts. Saying that we humans *naturally* make *moral judgements* can also mean a number of things, however, such as:

that we are designed to have particular moral attitudes toward particular kinds of things (for example, finding incest and patricide morally offensive), or it may mean that we have a proclivity to find something-or-other morally offensive (morally praiseworthy, etc.), where the content is determined by contingent environmental and cultural factors. These possibilities represent ends of a continuum; thus, many intermediate positions are tenable.[796]

In such a continuum, the fact that moral judgements reveal themselves to be 'strongly authoritative *prosocial* prescriptions' does not invalidate seeing them as the product of biological natural selection, since natural selection 'may very well in some circumstances prefer creatures with prosocial traits.' Joyce also reviews various studies, including those singled out by de Waal and by Singer, which support the notion that it was through modifying emotions that natural selection forged the human '*moral sense*'. He also examines some of the empirical evidence, largely from developmental psychology, which reinforces the view that is also a major hypothesis of his book, to the effect that 'the human moral sense *is* the product of biological natural selection' and that this is something that needs to be taken seriously.[797]

From the outset, Joyce makes his own position with regard to psychology, evolution and biology perfectly clear, as he takes up the discussion on evolutionary psychology and the role of its antecedent, sociobiology, in the development of some of our contemporary understandings of human social behaviour. In the 1980s, when sociobiology 'reinvented itself', as Joyce puts it, as evolutionary psychology, this involved much more than a change of name. As we have also seen, it ignited again the nature-nurture debate.

Sociobiology focuses on *innate behaviour*, whereas evolutionary psychology focuses on the *psychological mechanisms* underlying that behaviour. The important

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[796] *Ibid,* p.3

[797] *Ibid,* 'The Nature of Morality', pp.72-3 and *passim.* See also the Symposium on Joyce's book, his précis and his reply to critics, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77, 2008, pp.213-267 and 'Is Human Morality Innate?', in P. Carruthers, S. Laurence & S. Stich (eds.), 2006, *The Innate Mind: Culture and Cognition*, Oxford University Press, pp.257-279, reprinted in Michael Ruse, (ed.), 2009, *Philosophy after Darwin,* pp.452-463.

difference, Joyce points out, is that 'psychological mechanisms productive of adaptive behavior in a prehistoric past,' may, when operating in creatures no longer living in such an environment, result in 'different, surprising, and/or maladaptive behavior.' Three implications are worth noting in this respect:

 (i) Evolutionary psychology does not claim that observable human behavior is adaptive, but rather that it is produced by psychological mechanisms that are adaptations. The output of an adaptation need not be adaptive.

(ii) Nor does evolutionary psychology imply that an adaptation must result in cross-cultural universals in human behavior. The evolved mechanisms may be designed to be environmentally sensitive, may operate unexpectedly in unanticipated environments, or may not develop at all if not properly triggered. It is only in the absence of such defeaters that cross-culturality might be expected. This noted, cross-culturality can be offered as evidence of innateness in the absence of any better hypothesis indicating a universally present exogenous explanans.

(iii) Though preserving the word 'innate' primarily for psychological mechanisms, there seems nothing to prevent evolutionary psychologists from speaking also of 'innate behaviours' – where this does not mean *any behavior produced by an innate mechanism*, but rather is a claim about the past: roughly, that the behavior in question is generated by an innate mechanism in accordance with the mechanism's design (i.e., the mechanism is 'supposed' to produce this behavior in these conditions), in the sense that the existence of the mechanism is to be explained in part by reference to our ancestors having engaged in this type of behavior in these environmental conditions.[798]

Broadly speaking, the view that the basic features of the human mind are due to evolutionary pressures can be said to be incontrovertible. What seems to be controversial and divisive is to suppose that *everything* in human mentality can be explained by reference to biological natural selection. Though evolutionary psychology allows that a great deal of observable human behaviour *may* be the result of innate mechanisms thrown into a novel environment, it also allows that humans are 'behaviorally malleable in many respects' – that the very plasticity of many psychological mechanisms is an adaptation, and that the human brain is designed to produce variable responses to environmental variation. It is also more likely that across a range of domains this malleability is a design feature. On the other hand, the idea that the human mind is *nothing but* 'all-purpose flexibility' is obviously wrong, Joyce concludes. The very capacity to acquire beliefs from the environment demands

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[798] Richard Joyce, 2007, 'Human Nature', *The Evolution of Morality*, p.5

a 'complex array of inbuilt mental mechanisms.'[799]

By claiming that human morality is *genetically 'programmed'*, one does not deny the centrality of *cultural influence*, or even imply that *any* manifestation of morality is inevitable. With how much ease environmental factors may affect or even prevent the development of any genetically encoded trait is 'an empirical question.'[800] The point that something being part of our nature by no means makes its manifestation inevitable should be clear by now. But the fact is that modern human societies do have moral systems and that even in the most dire situations, 'morality clings on - or rather, humans cling on to morality.'[801]

The hypothesis that morality is innate need not be undermined by observation of the great variation in moral codes across human communities. There is no doubt that the content and the contours of any morality are highly influenced by culture, though Joyce also believes that 'it may be that the fact that a community has a morality *at all* is to be explained by reference to dedicated *psychological mechanisms* forged by biological natural selection.' That said, it is also perfectly possible that natural selection 'has taken *some* interest in the content of morality, perhaps favoring broad and general universals', which would account for the number of recurrent themes among *all* moral systems. This 'fixed' content would pertain to actions and judgements that enhance fitness, despite the variability of ancestral environments. Flexibility, Joyce reminds us, is good if the environment varies, but if the environment is very stable, then moral attitudes with fixed content may be more efficient. Phenotypic plasticity can be costly; learning introduces the dangers of trial-and-error experimentation, and involves a potentially costly amount of time.[802]

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[799] *Ibid*, pp.6-7. Lorenz's view of humans navigating between 'plasticity' and 'solidity' comes to mind here, as a prerequisite for autonomy and self-regulation, as does Singer's emphasis on our reasoning capacity as a guide to moral behaviour.

[800] *Ibid*, p.8. Drawing on a comparison between a genetic metabolic disorder causing mental retardation, Phenylketonuria (PKU), which can be easily avoided with a restricted diet, and Down's Syndrome, about which nothing can at present be done to avoid the expression of its characteristics, Joyce stresses the fact that there is 'no general relationship between genotype and phenotypic expression.' One could cite other examples, such as that of FOXP2, the gene that is responsible for enabling human speech, and whose absence in some individuals renders them incapable of language production. (See Matt Ridley, 2003, 'Conundrums of Culture', *Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience & What Makes Us Human*, particularly pp.214-19, for a discussion of this gene that acts as a transcription factor in humans).

[801] *Ibid*, p.9

[802] *Ibid*, p.10

The persistent worry that an evolutionary explanation for some morally obnoxious behaviour would in some manner validate the behaviour, or supply an excuse for its perpetrators was based on the misconceived claim that evolutionary psychology reveals behaviours to be 'inevitable' or 'determined by the genes', and this is, and always has been, 'a straw-man argument.' The tendency to let political preferences determine our acceptance of scientific theories, or to deny a theory irrespective of its empirical support simply because of uneasiness about its practical implications, Joyce remarks, has never deserved a place among the virtues of intellectual inquiry.[803]

With regard to the question of how much human psychology is to be explained by reference to discrete innate faculties, as opposed to resulting largely from learning and all-purpose flexibility, Joyce suggests that we 'keep our indecision proportional to the available evidence.' Despite all that he has said against some misguided opposition to Darwinian psychology, Joyce appreciates the need for caution. When it comes to the question of an *innate moral faculty*, we should not reject any hypothesis in advance of examining the evidence, since:

It is perfectly plausible that biological natural selection should have developed dedicated mechanisms designed to produce such judgments. It is just as plausible that it did nothing of the sort, and that moral judgment is a culturally generated capacity flowing from more general psychological faculties.[804]

Human biology, culture, and ethics

The third equally informative publication compiled by Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna in 2006, with contributions by philosophers and scientists, confirms the surge of interest in philosophical circles surrounding the relation between biological evolution and ethics.[805] As Boniolo and De Anna state in their Introduction, current debates seem to show that 'only an *integrated contribution* involving the new biological sciences and philosophy can shed light on human agency.' In the views that affirm that biological sciences have a role in explaining and/or justifying ethics, different degrees of naturalism have complicated the attempt to characterise the

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[803] *Ibid*, p.11
[804] *Ibid*, p.12
[805] Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna, 2006/2009, (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, Cambridge University Press, New York

relationship between justification and explanation. A weak form of naturalism - which this thesis may be seen to evidently endorse - sustains the idea 'that science is one of the many useful resources to explain and/or justify ethics but accepts that the latter cannot be reduced in any sense to the former.' A second form supports the view 'that science can explain ethics but cannot justify moral discourse', while a third and even stronger approach maintains the possibility 'that ethical normativity can be fully explained and justified scientifically', reducing moral discourse to scientific discourse, yet allowing it to 'preserve its colloquial autonomy.'[806]

The collection contains familiar names - Ruse, Kitcher, Ayala - serving in a way, to summarise many of the discussions above. Boniolo, for instance, engages with Ruse's methaethical concerns, claiming, in a similar manner to Joyce, that the evolutionary approach can explain the *genesis* of the enabling conditions for the human moral capacity, but not the diversity of ethical systems. His aim is to offer an explanation of moral capacities that follows directly from Darwin's theory of evolution and 'is compatible with a form of moral (phylo)genetic relativism.' Introducing distinctions between *behaviour, moral judgement on behaviour, and moral capacity* (that is, the capacity for both formulating and applying moral judgements on behaviour and for acting accordingly), Boniolo concludes that *only* the *moral capacity* can be naturalised with reference to evolutionary biology, while *moral judgements* and *moral systems* cannot, even if some contemporary authors suggest such a possibility. In this view, moral capacities have to be considered as 'an accidental evolutionary outcome that was made possible by the evolution of suitable cerebral-mental traits',[807] much as Pinker, Damasio, Edelman and Tononi, and Singer among others, have argued.

In the third part of the volume, Stefano Parmigiani, Gabriele De Anna, Danilo Mainardi, and Paola Palanza, take an evolutionary perspective, as their title of their essay suggests, on 'The Biology of Human Culture and Ethics.'[808] Arguing that *nature* and *nurture* cannot be sharply distinguished, they claim that facts about 'our nature' and the ways in which we come to form cultural traditions are entrenched in evolutionary processes. The question is not, therefore, whether ethical systems or

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[806] Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna, 2006/2009, 'Introduction', pp.1-2
[807] *Ibid*, pp.4-5
[808] Stefano Parmigiani, Gabriele De Anna, Danilo Mainardi, and Paola Palanza, 'The Biology of Human Culture and Ethics', chapter 7, in Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna 2006/2009, (eds.), pp.121-38

moral norms can be reduced to *natural* facts or *cultural* facts; what is important is to realise that 'some natural and cultural facts' *are ethically relevant*.

When they speak of 'human nature', the authors do not refer to any particular philosophical conception of 'man', or to any perspective on our species coming from a particular science. Rather, what they seek is *a unifying conception* by joining together data from different disciplines. The understanding of 'human nature' they want to convey, is a 'logical space' (borrowing from Wittgenstein the term) of 'phenotypical traits, biological, psychological, behavioural, etc.', which is a function of genotypes and environmental variables. Evolutionary considerations are thus seen to help determine this logical space, enlarging and refining our conception of 'human nature'. As a consequence, the writers discover that 'certain ethically relevant facts are universal features of our species', and not the mere outcome of culture.[809]

Parmigiani and colleagues see the nature-nurture debate framed within two different approaches to human behaviour: that of ethology, on the nature side, and behavioural and comparative psychology, on the nurture side, with modern genetics having the effect of informing and thus mollifying extreme positions. The concept of phenotype, which refers to the expression of genes and of their interaction with developmental and environmental factors, has also advanced the debate. Armed with the knowledge that this concept has provided, even the more complex kinds of human behaviour, as is the ability to learn and use language, for example, have been found to have a *genetic basis*, and not a *purely* learned, cultural, or social base. Certain kinds of complex behaviour are not purely 'natural' moreover, because they are phenotypical traits, the realisation of which requires also suitable environmental conditions.[810]

We also know, from other studies mentioned earlier, that that some attitudes and propensities that may be in some sense be deemed characteristic of 'human nature' (including what can be seen as more controversial or negative traits, like jealousy, preferences about the properties of mates, aggressive disposition, and others), can and are heavily influenced by our higher cognitive and rational capacities, which in turn are subject to unconscious biases, often determined by our underlying emotions.

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[809] *Ibid*, pp.121-22
[810] *Ibid*, pp.123-4

These higher order capacities, moreover, may well be relevant for the development of ethical systems and for normatively guided behaviour.

The upshot of the new perspective that these writers have developed is that *no kind of behaviour* can be said to be *purely inherited* or *purely learned*. It is always the result of 'a complex combination of genetic and environmental factors.' The latter may include cultural and social aspects of course. When contemporary scientists speak of a behaviour being species-specific and genetically-based, they do not mean that it is *fully* determined by the genes. A better understanding of this can be provided if we look at courtship in male mammals, which is normally considered strongly based on genetic inheritance, but which is always the result of several cascade events, both biological and non-biological, in humans included. This means that in order for the behaviour to take place, certain cognitive development has to occur, which may in turn eventually be 'learned' from the cultural and social environment. We can see why a deeper understanding of genetic developmental biology would serve to dispel many disagreements among philosophers, human or social scientists, and evolutionary biologists.[811]

Consideration of the knowledge we now have about the neo-Darwinian framework involving sexual selection and the evolution of human mental traits allows us to speculate about the *biological roots* of certain ethical norms and social prescriptions. In this connection, it must be recalled that human beings do not transmit only 'genetic information' to the next generation, but also 'cultural information', through the process of learning and teaching. As we have seen, Dawkins defined these 'pieces of cultural information' as 'memes', to account for the *continuum* between biological evolution and cultural evolution. Biology *and* culture interact and 'play the game of the evolution of human nature.' In fact, gene variations can be seen to influence culturally determined kinds of behaviour (recall the 'epigenetic rules' that Wilson and others see as having a role in this interaction), but also variations in culture and traditions provide, as feedback, selective pressures on genes.[812]

Parmigiani et al conclude that it is plausible, like Joyce does, that *our moral*

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[811] *Ibid*, p.124
[812] *Ibid*, pp.133-34

capacities 'are universal features of human nature' that were selected throughout evolution, though this does *not* imply that ethics is 'determined' by genetics. It is also an open question whether 'indeterminism' is only *epistemic* or goes all the way down to the *ontological leve*l, just to add to the complexity of the debate. Moreover, if culture alone is seen to fully determine the psychological and volitional antecedents of action, there would be no room for free will. The evolutionary approach to humankind and its cultural products, such as morality, ethics, and even religion, far from being a dogmatic biological determinism, may contribute, through the interactions with other disciplines such as human and social sciences, philosophy, and also theology, to understanding the dignity and the uniqueness of our 'human nature.'

The previously considered examples indicate that our *human biological nature* and *human cultures* cannot be sharply separated, but they constitute *a continuum.* Although we presently lack a suitable theory that may succeed in integrating cultural evolution with biological evolution, we cannot but concur with these authors in their belief that 'the biological genetically-based evolution of the human species and the Lamarckian evolution of culture can and must be merged in an integrated explanation.' As we hope for this integration to occur in our own time and for the benefit of future generations, it is of paramount importance to realise that all attempts to explain or justify ethics that 'keep human nature and human culture sharply distinct', must be fundamentally flawed.[813]

Motivated by similar concerns, geneticist Francisco Ayala also attempts an account of ethics within an outlook that is not fully naturalistic concerning moral norms, but that nevertheless sees the need for an evolutionary explanation of the reasons why certain sets of norms developed, by similarly suggesting that in humans there are two kinds of heredity: the *biological* and the *cultural*. Biological inheritance is based on the transmission of genetic information from parents to offspring, in humans as in other sexually reproducing organisms, while cultural inheritance, on the other hand, being distinctively human, is based on transmission of information through a teaching and learning process which is, in principle, independent of biological parentage. In a manner similar to Gould, Ayala claims that cultural heredity is a swifter and more effective mode of adaptation to the environment than the biological mode. The

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[813] *Ibid*, pp.136-7

proclivity to make ethical judgements, however, is *rooted in our biological nature*, a necessary outcome of our highly-evolved mental capacity, itself an attribute promoted by natural selection. Thus, Ayala concludes:

Moral codes, like any other dimensions of cultural systems, depend on the existence of human biological nature and must be consistent with it in the sense that they could not counteract it without promoting their own demise. Moreover, the acceptance and persistence of moral norms is facilitated whenever they are consistent with biologically conditioned human behaviors.[814]

The moral codes that guide our evaluations of actions are thus the products of culture, which include social and religious traditions, a point developed above. Like Ayala, Boniolo and De Anna also declare that 'our moral codes, and hence, our self-referential reflexive moral understanding, are the result of cultural heredity.' Cultural evolution may thus hope to explain ethical systems, even though a justification of ethical systems is still needed, but we must not lose sight of the fact that both biological and cultural evolution must always be seen as a continuum.[815]

As a final remark, we tend to agree with Boniolo and De Anna's claim that 'scientific findings *are* relevant for our understanding of all aspects of morality', and that these involve issues concerning our moral capacities, not least those that support our moral agency, but also those that relate to our everyday understanding of moral obligations and our moral self-conception. We thus share in their hope that:

[P]hilosophers of all persuasions, not only naturalistically minded philosophers, might well see that scientific findings can be usefully adopted in their work on ethics, without the risk of introducing (potentially question-begging) heavy naturalistic assumptions that might lead to a deflationary conception of ethics. Scientists might notice how problematic and moot are the philosophical bearings of their results and may appreciate what sorts of empirical evidence is expected from their work for philosophical purposes.

Moreover, it may even be the case that these explanations can be employed in some attempts of justification that do not rely on evolutionism but are naturalistic

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[814] Francisco Ayala, 'Biology to Ethics: An Evolutionist's view of Human Nature', chapter 8, in Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna, 2006/2009, p.149
[815] Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele De Anna, 2006/2009, 'Introduction', pp.7-8

nonetheless.[816]

The extensive ground that the most relevant and current philosophical and scientific studies concerned with our 'human nature' covers has been examined as thoroughly as possible, within the scope and limitations of this thesis. The conclusions in this chapter are those that resonate with the intent of our *poietic* exploration, which has taken us through the many twists and turns that have led people through the ages to characterise 'human nature', and with the argument that calls for an open sharing of the knowledge discovered along the way as a result of the different theories and perspectives that have been put forward in the course of our necessarily compressed examination. The research reviewed seems to be heading in the right direction, and continuing investigations on these questions will throw further light on the complexity of the task of defining ourselves and explaining the origins and the value of our morality, and finding the reasons to uphold our most cherished ethical convictions, as we are impelled by the creative drive, the intellectual curiosity, and the good will that characterises us humans to find rationally based and empirically validated answers that may satisfy both heart and mind.

One last perspective, only hinted at previously, will complement our exploration. It is a proposal that suggests how we can attune our 'human nature' in a way that expands our morality and deepens our own ethical understandings. It challenges us to conceive ethics along the lines of human ecology. This is the innovative outlook that Flanagan wishes us to adopt, and that arises from the belief that we all wish to flourish, and that 'virtue and goodness, love and friendship, concern for those less fortunate, will help one do so.' This is a belief that would also seem to underlie most of the moral principles that we humans have held as the foundations of civilised society. We can conceive this proposal as an inquiry into the conditions under which people at different times and in different places flourish, just as ecology studies how different life-forms flourish in their environments:

Certain environments are objectively better for the flourishing of wetlands, beavers, orchids, and pine

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[816] *Ibid*, p.10. Boniolo and De Anna cite recent natural-law attempts to justify ethics, such as those by Philippa Foot (2001) and Mark Murphy (2001), which rely on facts concerning human nature as reasons for actions that may justify ethical systems, believing that similar attempts may find in the explanations of human moral capacities and ethical systems presented in their collection important insights for the understanding of human nature.

forests. Ethics is the normative science that studies the objective conditions that lead to flourishing of persons […] If ethics is conceived along the lines of human ecology, then it must be accepted that emotions are deeply involved in moral life; at the same time, this scenario denies that all emotions are non-rational, fickle, and flighty. Humans do better, indeed they flourish, if they feel, think, and act in some ways rather than others.[817]

One way to address the different ways in which people find their good is to engage in a kind of 'meta-ecology', Flanagan suggests, and this, following Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, involves 'trying to isolate the conditions of human flourishing that are not just our own, but that apply across human habitats.'[818] The concern of ethics for the flourishing of human beings does not ignore the question of whether humans have responsibilities to nature or to non-human sentient beings. If we understand our natures, and that of the rest of nature's bounty deeply enough, we will be moved to be 'morally attentive to the well-being of much more than our fellow humans.' We will have 'moral impulses to care for nature as such', and our impulses will not rest on solely instrumental reasons, or arise from enlightened self-interest moreover, but 'from a recognition that the well-being of nature is an intrinsic good.'[819]

If we endorse Flanagan's view, we will find great affinity with the personal ecosophy of the late Arne Naess, the founder of Deep Ecology, who proposed 'self-realisation' as the one ultimate premise of his philosophy, aimed towards the formation and development of the 'ecological self.'[820] In an essay originally given as a lecture,[821] Naess defined self-realisation as 'an ecological approach to being in the world',

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[817] Owen Flanagan, 2002, 'Human Being', *The Problem of the Soul*, p.17

[818] Owen Flanagan, 2002, 'Ethics as Human Ecology', *The Problem of the Soul*, p.289. Flanagan takes Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen as examples of the sort of meta-ecological work that he has in mind, as their 'capabilities approach' is designed specifically to make judgements about how well different cultures provide the conditions necessary for human flourishing. (Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds., 1992, *The Quality of Life*, Oxford University Press, New York)

[819] *Ibid*, p.267

[820] George Sessions, the editor of an extensive compilation on Deep Ecology, explains this notion as follows: 'What Naess means, in part, by 'Self-Realization' is the Universe (Nature, the Tao), and all the individuals (human and nonhuman) of which it is comprised, realizing itself. Following the insights of Gandhi and Spinoza, human individuals attain personal self-realization, and psychological/emotional maturity when they progress from an identification with narrow ego, through identification with other humans, to a more all-encompassing identification of their 'self' with nonhuman individuals, species, ecosystems, and with the ecosphere itself. This process of 'wide identification' Naess takes to be a process of the development of the 'ecological self. (George Sessions, ed., 1995, 'Arne Naess on Deep Ecology and Ecosophy', Part Three, 'Introduction', *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, pp.189-190). Sessions believes that considerable confusion has arisen when 'this psychological process or thesis of Self-Realization is taken to be an identifying characteristic of the Deep Ecology movement', although many other supporters do identify with these principles.

[821] The essay, under the title 'Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World', was originally given as a lecture by Naess on March 12, 1986, at Murdoch University, Western Australia, and is reprinted in this 1995 collection. (Arne Naess, 'Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World', in George Sessions (ed.), 1995, Part Three, pp.225-59)

believing that 'human nature' is such, that with sufficient maturity, 'we cannot help but "identify" our self with all living beings; beautiful or ugly, big or small, sentient or not.' The meaning in life and the joy we experience in living is increased through increased self-realisation; that is, 'through the fulfilment of potentials each of us has, but which are never exactly the same for any two living beings.' Increased self-realisation implies, significantly, as Naess explains, 'a broadening and deepening of the self', and because of this, we come to 'see ourselves in others.' Our self-realisation is therefore hindered, 'if the self-realization of others, with whom we identify, is hindered.'[822]

If reality is as it is experienced by the ecological self, Naess claimed that our behaviour '*naturally* and beautifully follows strict norms of environmental ethics.' Change is to be achieved through a *deepened perception* of reality and of our own self; a deepened realism. This is a question, in other words, 'of healing our relations to the widest community - that of all living beings.'[823]

Our discussion in this chapter has taken us practically full-circle to a view of 'human nature' and human morality that, informed by the latest scientific findings in the natural sciences, does not ignore our best humanistic traditions. The ongoing quest to understand our humanity, our rationality, and the richness and complexity of our biological and cultural achievements is clearly visible in the continuous efforts of our exemplary scientists and our best thinkers in the humanities, as the reflections in this thesis have attempted to show. The different understandings gained from such reflections, as the journey undertaken in this thesis has shown, confirm that we humans basically desire to do what is right; that we value not only what is good for our own self-realisation, but that we are capable of expanding our self-interest; that we intrinsically *care about* and *seek goodness* and *morality* as a universal ideal. That we have been able to devise codes of ethics to guide not only our instinctive behaviour, but have thought of *the good*, and acted, in the best of cases, conceiving it as something of a universal entitlement, is a tribute to the long tradition of Western philosophical and ethical discourse with which this thesis has engaged.

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[822] Arne Naess, 'Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World', p.226
[823] *Ibid*, p.236

Some summative reflections by way of conclusion

As self-conscious moral agents, we can sometimes reflect on ourselves as natural creatures in a physical universe, as well as beings that respond to reason. In our *poietic* journey through the different conceptions of our 'human nature' that signalled pivotal turns in our Western cultural history, we have also examined the parallel concept of the 'ethical self', as this thesis centred on our moral and ethical concerns, as distinguishing characteristics of human beings. In our moral and rational world, explanations and reasons figure as objects of analysis. To undertake such analysis has been one of the objectives of this thesis.

We have thus followed various claims for morality, including those that hold that some good derives, in a specific sense, from an *innate disposition* that impels humans to act in accordance to what is 'right', but which were often either contested, or thought to need the support of other attributes of our 'human nature.' Moral conduct throughout history has thus often been justified by its efficacy in securing certain goods. The norms that once guided individual conduct in the ancient *polis* were subsequently extended and deployed in the public sphere by the burgeoning nations of Europe, with the regulation of behaviour promptly seen as a mechanism to safeguard the political and socioeconomic stability, and hence the prosperity of the entire nation and its citizenry. A utilitarian ethos, or a divinely prescribed set of precepts, was from there on regularly invoked, imposing its own moral order, designed as a system that enabled humans to avoid conflict and to lead a harmonious existence that encouraged, in times of peace, the many achievements of Western civilisation.

From the Aristotelian conception of the virtues that characterised a moral individual, to the enduring Platonic idealisations of *the good*, and the transformations of this and other classical beliefs in their passage from antiquity to a mostly Christian-dominated outlook in the Middle Ages and through most of the Renaissance period, humanity has endeavoured to define its, our, 'human nature', in terms of the values of the time, whether it be a sense of honour and virtue, the love of God and belief in an afterlife, or a basic sense of commonality with other beings that valued justice and recognition

for the human person, and inspired a further desire to understand all our human traits and capabilities, including, as time went on, those that make us behave, on the whole, with a sense of empathy, and even feel responsibility and compassion for other beings, even those outside our own immediate family circle.

As we followed the steps of the pioneers who, like Descartes, began to wonder about the makeup of our physical and mental selves, preparing the ground for the disengaged rationality of scientific materialism that would soon pervade European thought, we saw natural philosophy, to which traditional moral philosophy now gravitated, gaining in prestige, and applying its own methods to the task of understanding our 'human nature.' In the midst of all this, the philosophical impulse in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson identified an intrinsic *benevolence* in humans, a *moral sense* that also derived from the Augustinian belief in rationality, founded on the divine love that dwells in all human beings, the *agape* that binds us all, and which in turn developed into a mostly aesthetic appreciation that linked science with the divine order and the beauty of nature, while Turnbull emphasised *knowledge* and *virtue* as the basis for morality, and opened a space for *free will*. But it was Hume who would most successfully develop these notions, as he sought to discover, in his attempts to further the experimental method, the *foundations of morals* in a universal 'human nature', only to conclude that *reason* and *moral sentiments*, as well as *sympathy*, are instrumental in guiding human motivation, and in ensuring the smooth functioning of civilised society.

As the scientific revolution advanced, we find a continuation of this major turn towards Baconian science and empiricism, as the most materialistic of Enlightenment philosophers also look for explanations of human morality in other attributes of our 'human nature.' Diderot's early attempts to characterise *the self* and understand human conduct, for example, centred on *sense experience* and in the organisation of the mind's faculties. An idealised belief in the triumph of human *rationality* and *benevolence* and the *dignity of human beings*, with its consequent bounty of *universal goodness*, accompanied Condorcet, and those whom his vision inspired. In this universalising framework that tended to think mostly of our 'human nature' as *free* and powered by *reason,* the idea of *a natural state* of untainted dispositions to the good underlies the belief in the *'good will'* that Rousseau thought characterised

humans.

Kant and his followers were also led to conclude that it is this innate goodness, but mainly our *rational capacity* that makes humans worthy of *dignity* and *respect,* and endows us with individual *autonomy*. To regard individuals as rational human beings endowed with such traits was a fundamental *poietic* turn in Western history, for this also meant, following the Kantian *categorical imperative* that such premise entailed, that 'human nature' thus ennobled became the founding notion of individual *human rights*, an idea that from that point on was universally recognised in the West.

In the midst of proclamations that led humans to focus on the material world, a world which was thought could be mastered through the use of reason, vestiges of Deism made these self-confident rational beings turn towards other feelings and capacities that allowed them to express different aspects of their 'human nature', where the artistic, the poetic, the more intangible effects of music, and other products of the human spirit found their home, through a connection with nature articulated in the *expressionism* of the day. And here too, somewhere in the background perhaps, as Taylor suggests, flowed an undercurrent of reverence, possibly tinged with the Protestant divine grace, a longing for something beyond ourselves, as humans continued their search for meaning and goodness.

The *moral sense* that Darwin set about to explore and which he, like Hume believed arose from our sympathetic instincts, curbing selfish behaviour and promoting social coherence, has since been the focus of many a contemporary discussion on whether *biology* or *culture* made of us *moral beings*. In one of its most significant twists and turns, the debate has centred once again on whether this *moral proclivity* that Darwin first saw as a manifestation of a similar disposition in other creatures can be said to have always existed in our 'human nature', or whether we owe its expression and survival to our cultural habits and the traditions that have fostered it. The inquiry into these and many other aspects of our 'human nature' which had been central to the way moral philosophy developed in European thought was undoubtedly enhanced by an empirical Neo-Darwinian approach to these concerns, which to this day also remain at the heart of most moral philosophical investigations.

The confidence and self assurance that followed the burst of philosophical and scientific illumination would soon be tempered by an ongoing realisation that all of our human powers, endowments and capabilities are necessarily limited by our physical, intellectual, emotional and environmental boundaries. Our eternal quest for finding out more about who we are, and what we are capable of, persists nonetheless. At the dawn of this new century, more scientific discoveries have taken us even further back, to the manner in which we humans first emerged from that 'dark abyss of time', but this new knowledge has made us more realistic; has made us turn into global citizens of a chastened world, poised in our fragile planet, with boundless prospects for further flourishing, but equally for endless possibilities for self-destruction and environmental devastation. Evolutionary biology, aided by genetics and the newer branches of psychology and neuroscience, now working in close collaboration, has revealed that all the characteristics of our 'human nature' are both enabled, as well as constrained by our phenotype, the legacy of our genetic past, as much as by our own environmental and social development. The knowledge that we have gained in the decades that have elapsed has furthered our understanding of our own conscious behaviour. The latest findings of neuroscientists and psychologists, such as Damasio, Edelman and Tononi, and of anthropologists, linguists and philosophers, like Pinker and Dennett, as well as cognitive scientists, like Hofstadter, have given us a better understanding of the way in which our brain allows our self to emerge and interact with its immediate environment, and through the traits thus activated, our imagination and creativity to grow, and our human culture to thrive.

What have we gained in our *poietic* meandering, as we contemplated the parallel 'evolution' of our biological and cultural selves, the unfathomed capacities of our human mind, and the way in which our emotions operate at the core of our reasoning? We have perhaps established, in the course of this brief excursus into the many aspects of our 'human nature', into the depths of our selfhood and our human consciousness, into the origins of the many capacities that make us 'human', some simple but fundamental facts: that we cannot separate our biology from our culture; that both have evolved in a symbiotic relationship; that in such an interaction, we have come to describe ourselves as 'moral animals', and even as *ethical beings*; that we now are fully cognisant of what makes us, this peculiar kind of animal, flourish, and what it means for us to honour our 'human nature.'

That acting on what we have learned is often a lonely task, a unique and at times misguided experience is also true, but now that we know that our own conception as rational, moral beings owes as much to our physical, as well as to our sociocultural development, we can with some confidence say that we understand what 'flourishing' means for us and for other sentient beings. This is the new holistic perspective that this thesis has sought to argue for and ultimately emphasise, as it has endeavoured to show that it is our *ethical commitment*, our own ethical outlook that can deepen our relations to one another, expanding our self and our concern for others. This is what enables us, as prosocial animals, to want to ensure that peace and justice prevail in the world for humans and non-humans, as we fully realise our own selfhood and well-being, respect our living world, and enable *the good life* that we all aspire to lead.

This thesis does not claim to have exhausted the many and varied ways of conceiving 'human nature' and human morality, but has simply attempted to highlight the more salient ideas that we in the Western world have developed around these concerns. We must take heart, regardless of our many failures and limitations, from the inspiring thoughts that have led us to define and to rejoice in what is best in our 'human nature.' From the Greek concern with 'what is good for man', to the Humean commendation of our 'moral sentiments', and the Rousseanian belief in 'conscience' to guide our instincts; from the Kantian affirmation of our rationality, and of the dignity and autonomy inherent in all human persons, to the Darwinian aspiration 'to do good unto others', enshrined in the ethical and legal codes that guarantee our individual and collective freedom, there is a strong thread in this our *poiesis of 'human nature'*, an unbroken aspiration to create the best possible life for us all, and a promise for the future of successive generations.

We are sophisticated animals, different from other species only in degrees, but with the capacity to reflect on our behaviour, our actions and their consequences. We have invented culture and everything that comes along with it - the literature to tell our stories, the arts to depict them and represent them, the music that stirs our emotions, the technological advances that extend our consciousness and abilities. Our genes are not our destiny, but they do tell the story of our biology. Our conscious awareness and our prosocial instincts, our feelings and emotions, our intellectual capacity, our

language ability and our inclination towards rational and ethical living, all make up our complex and bewildering 'human nature.' Out of this combination a sense of self emerges that makes of each of us a unique human being, striving for fulfilment and self-realisation in a unique physical, cultural and spiritual milieu.

What is evident too is that everything that constitutes our humanity, the peace and stability of our culture, is ultimately dependent on our health as living organisms, and that this also depends on the health of the physical and social environment that sustains us. We now know that both can be easily damaged, as we have the potential to change ourselves and our environment in ways that can also affect every other living system. As our knowledge increases, we will come to fathom the depths of our conscious mind, the contradictory impulses of our behaviour, the full complexity of our human condition, and that of other living organisms on our planet. And we will continue to need our science, our arts, and our philosophy to guide us, to uphold our rationality and our moral convictions, the values that support our sense of freedom and purpose, our cultural beliefs, and the meaning we attach to our lives. As we reflect on our shared responsibility for the health, happiness and security, for the flourishing of all living beings, it would serve us well to dwell upon this thought:

We are conscious beings on a quest, a quest that achieves its aims when we use our minds to flourish and to be good. These are our most noble aims. […] Insofar as we aim to realize ideals that are possible but not yet real, the quest can be legitimately described as spiritual…This quest suits the human animal well. It is becoming, worthy, and noble. It is the most we can aim for given the kind of creature we are, and happily it is enough. [….] Trust me, you can't get more. But what you can get, if you live well, is enough. Don't be greedy. Enough is enough.[824]

Enough is enough, indeed…if we manage to live well. We need balance, equilibrium; we need our emotions, and our rationality, our sciences and our humanities. If we can think, with Darwin, that 'there is grandeur in this view of life', and we can live with dignity and respect, in solidarity with others, we can partake in its splendour. If we can live joyfully and peacefully on our earthly sojourn, we may come to feel the power of the statement that 'from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful

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[824] Owen Flanagan, 2002, 'Ethics as Human Ecology', *The Problem of the Soul*, p.319

and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.'[825] We humans are part of this miracle of creation, however conceived.

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[825] From Charles Darwin's last paragraph of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 1859, edited with an Introduction by J.W. Burrow, Penguin Books, 1985, p.460. The complete sentence and the one preceding it, reads: 'Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.' (pp.459-60) Also quoted in Richard Dawkins, 2009, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, p.399.

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