

PHILOSOPHISING THROUGH THE EYE OF THE MIND

Philosophy as Ethos and Praxis

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By Dr Peter Critchley

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Peter Critchley is a philosopher, writer and tutor with a first degree in the field of the Social Sciences (History, Economics, Politics and Sociology) and a PhD in the field of Philosophy, Ethics and Politics. *Philosophising through the Eye of the Mind* was written from a number of talks and lectures introducing philosophy that Peter prepared and gave in 2010 in Liverpool. Peter works in the tradition of *Rational Freedom*, a tradition which sees freedom as a common endeavour in which the freedom of each individual is conceived to be co-existent with the freedom of all. In elaborating this concept, Peter has written extensively on a number of the key thinkers in this 'rational' tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Dante, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Habermas). Peter is currently engaged in an ambitious interdisciplinary research project entitled *Being and Place*. The central theme of this research concerns the connection of place and identity through the creation of forms of life which enable human and planetary flourishing in unison. Peter tutors across the humanities and social sciences, from A level to postgraduate research. Peter particularly welcomes interest from those not engaged in formal education, but who wish to pursue a course of studies out of intellectual curiosity. Peter is committed to bringing philosophy back to its Socratic roots in *ethos*, in the way of life of people. In this conception, philosophy as self-knowledge is something that human beings *do* as a condition of living the examined life. As we think, so shall we live. Living up to this philosophical commitment, Peter offers tutoring services both to those in and out of formal education.

The subject range that Peter offers in his tutoring activities, as well as contact details, can be seen at <http://petercritchley-e-akademeia.yolasite.com>

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Peter sees his e-akademeia project as part of a global grassroots learning experience and encourages students and learners to get in touch, whatever their learning need and level.

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1 INTRODUCTION

When asked to explain the purpose of philosophy, Wittgenstein replied that the value of philosophy lies in showing the fly the way out of the bottle. The fly's senses reveal its world to be all around it, and yet the fly cannot access that world. Instead, it keeps hitting the walls of its glass prison, not understanding the nature of the barriers to its freedom. The senses reveal so much but yet they reveal nothing at all; they tell part of the truth of the real world but not it all. The senses do not reveal the way out of the bottle, the prison of the senses, they do not show the paths to truth and freedom.

Philosophy employs what Plato calls 'the eye of the mind' to go beyond the immediacy revealed by sense experience so as to access the true reality revealed by the intellect.

In this view of philosophy, there are levels of cognition which ascend from instincts and desires at the level of immediacy up to reason and intellect at the highest level. The path to truth, knowledge and freedom leads at the summit, the opening at the top of the bottle. This is the way of philosophy. The intellect shows the true reality. This is reality as seen through the eye of the mind.

The phrase ‘the eye of the mind’ comes from Plato. Wittgenstein’s fly in the bottle is really a simplified version of Plato’s allegory of the prisoners in the cave who, in mistaking the shadows on the wall for the true reality, remain chained by their senses to empirical necessity. Philosophy is the path to enlightenment, to see by the light of the Sun in the real world outside of the cave of illusion. Most people dwell in the blissful ignorance of partial knowledge. For philosophers, however, ignorance is never bliss, it is a passive contentment that leaves human beings living unfulfilled lives which fall far short of the potentialities individuals are born with. Partial knowledge, at best, leads only to a partial freedom and a partial life. But if ignorance isn’t bliss, then neither too is knowledge in itself. It depends on the extent to which knowledge is used to transform existence in such a way as to enable human beings to live full and flourishing lives. Short of that end, knowledge can be the way of pain, misery and suffering. If we knew everything about the inner workings of the systems, governments, and corporations that run our world, all those forces which cast their shadows on the wall and beguile us with illusion, then the result might well be a perpetual state of anxiety. Rather than stand up and be counted, many might well prefer the tranquillity and contentment of the world of illusion, the cosy world in which reality is as the puppet masters say it is and individuals prefer not to question. The problem is that these troubling questions do not go away and most people, at some point in their lives, wonder whether reality really is as they constantly told it is. The questions are not expressed in a public way but instead go underground, are sublimated, and create some very uneasy consciences. The underlying anxiety which pervades such a society can never be a blissful state. There is a saying that most people lead lives of quiet despair. Seeing the light and living by it may take courage, but it offers an alternative to such a wasting of life. To many people, philosophers seem to be an odd, fractious and frankly cantankerous bunch. Guilty as charged. If there’s a hair to be split, you can be sure that some philosopher somewhere will be splitting it. A philosopher has three questions for every answer. Those living in the blissful ignorance of sensory contentment are genuinely non-plussed by the philosopher. ‘Why do you keep questioning?’ they ask. It was Einstein who insisted that the important thing in life is to keep asking questions. ‘You only get one life’ say those genuinely baffled by a philosopher’s approach to the world. Such a person really does think – if they think at all - that ignorance is bliss. They are content in being absorbed in the world of the

senses and cannot understand the philosophical quest to reveal a world of greater, richer possibilities far beyond the immediacy of the senses.

That is the point of Plato's allegory of the cave. The prisoner who escapes his chains of illusion and sees the light outside cannot make himself understood by those who cannot conceive a reality other than the shadows on the wall. 'The unexamined life is not worth living' stated Plato, and that is the answer to all those who, living in contented ignorance, turn on those who, like Einstein, keep questioning. You do indeed only get the one life. Doesn't it make sense, then, to examine that life and ensure that it is well lived?

Here is the classical collision between the ignorant and the enlightened, each trying to tempt the other into a different way of life. Except a life of blissful ignorance is not a way of life at all, it is the way of sleep, of existing by the senses alone, being driven by purposes and imperatives which are external to oneself. Of course, the contented don't see the problem at all. If they did, there would be no need for philosophers showing the path to enlightenment, goading people into using their rational faculties. And here lies the paradox of emancipation – those used only to the shadows of illusion through being chained to physical existence are epistemologically and structurally incapable of appreciating the message of enlightenment and emancipation that philosophers bring. Even if a philosopher tells the fly the way out of the bottle, there is no certainty that the fly will understand the message, let alone act on it. The prisoners in Plato's cave ultimately turn upon the escaped prisoner who returns with the message that another, truer, reality exists. They don't understand him, cannot accept that he is telling the truth and finally cannot live with the anxiety that knowledge of a possible alternative exists brings. They prefer the contentment of ignorance and illusion. That is the life that many people reconcile themselves to, the 'only one life' we are supposed to value. That assertion is a form of self-protection against those who would disturb the world of contentment. Such people are happy to waste their lives by being complicit in a world of ignorance and illusion. Having abandoned their birthright, they have no right to silence those who affirm a greater range of possibilities.

Contentment in an existing condition is no answer at all to the question of life. It is an attempt to avoid the question, trying to silence those trouble-makers who have the nerve and the nous to keep questioning. Contentment allows the forces that rule the

world to stay comfortably invisible and, to that extent, implicates the contended in continued corruption, injustice, exploitation, and environmental degradation. It is a wilful ignorance. The question is how we drag our heads out of the political and ideological matrix and equip individuals to see the big picture, the true numbers, the deeper forces and drivers behind the flickering shadows on the wall we call reality.

Something that should be made clear is that ideas alone are insufficient. The prisoners can be shown the way out of the cave, but they will not necessarily follow. The ideas may be perfectly ‘clear and distinct’, to use Descartes phrase, but they will not necessarily be understood and accepted. Marx used the term critical-revolutionary praxis to affirm the unity of theory and praxis. In Marx’s praxis philosophy, philosophy becomes worldly as the world becomes philosophical. In changing the world, we change ourselves. ‘The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.’ (Marx, Thesis III on Feuerbach).

Intellect alone is not enough. Ideas at rest tend to stay at rest. The world is changed only when someone takes a stand and sets an idea into motion. All successful and powerful human organizations, whether we are talking of governments or the Girl Guides, civil movements or local co-ops, began when people stopped following along a pre-determined path and decided to do something different, something better. Start-ups of all kinds generate more positive influences and potentials for transformation than any individual could ever create alone, no matter how great a philosopher they may be. Socrates started a whole movement but he was always clear that philosophy is an *ethos*, a way of life that is meant to be lived. In this sense, philosophy is a soft technology for changing the world.

The first question people new to philosophy are likely to ask is ‘what *is* philosophy?’ This one question leads to all the other questions. What are boundaries that distinguish philosophy from other disciplines? How does philosophy differ from science and religion? What are the main branches of philosophy? Schools of thought? Who are the major philosophers? What makes them all *philosophers*?

There are no straightforward answers to these questions. Although considered an academic discipline which takes place in an ivory tower, in its Socratic origins, philosophy is a way of life, a practice. But does this mean that anyone who lives life well, without reflecting upon that life, a philosopher? If it does, then my budgerigar counts as a philosopher. Plainly, we are dealing with a philosophical *ethos*, philosophy as a way of life. And this begs a conception of what philosophy is.

An initial definition may be that philosophy concerns questions that are both significant and deep. Deep here means going beyond the reach of the empirical or mathematical sciences. For instance, a deep question is why there is something rather than nothing, not merely what that something is. Questions of moral value also fall into this category.

However, this initial definition is only part of the answer, and very misleading in itself. Bertrand Russell argued that the man who generalises generally lies, and here one sees the errors that result from turning parts into wholes, the local-global fallacy. For *there are* philosophical questions that science can settle by empirical observation. Many would argue that this is true of the question of the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Does the empirical evidence weigh in favour or against the existence of God? Yet the question of whether God exists remains a philosophical question. There are many others who argue that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. How is it possible to prove that God doesn't exist? My garden is full of invisible pixies that leave no trace. I can't prove that they are there, but you cannot prove that they are not. It is not possible to prove a negative. In the tradition of Logical Positivism, a meaningful question about God cannot be put; the question of God's existence or otherwise is non-sense. Yet it remains a philosophical question. And the invisible pixies in my garden continue to work their magic.



Dell, Ethelinde Fairies and a Fieldmouse

Dell, Ethelinde Midsummer Fairies

One could define philosophy more as a practice or an *activity* than as an intellectual exercise or subject discipline. Philosophy is something that one does as a rational being. But, of course, thinking is an integral part of that doing. Long before Cartesian doubt, a questioning, critical approach grounded in the rational faculty was taken to be the most salient characteristic of philosophy. This is certainly the case with respect to Western philosophy since Socrates, highlighting the way that Socrates would subject peoples' views, beliefs and arguments to close questioning. In quizzing people in conversation, in dialogue, Socrates wanted to get individuals to support their views and activities with arguments, to give good reasons for doing, thinking, stating the things they did. Otherwise, a way of life is merely second hand, a reliance on habit and custom rather than one's own understanding and moral autonomy.

However, such an approach is a necessary but insufficient condition of doing philosophy. A rational, critical method is not exclusive to philosophy. It is what philosophy does with that method, the questions it asks and why, that distinguishes philosophy.

Wittgenstein's *family resemblance concept* is helpful when it comes to making sense of the question 'what is philosophy?' Whilst philosophers evince a wide variety of interests and subject areas, there are many overlapping themes that draw them together. Whilst it is not always possible to identify a single common feature that

defines them as philosophers, there are similarities in the questions asked and in the way that questions are asked. One advantage of conceiving philosophy in terms of a family resemblance concept is that it makes the subject wider than the systematic, professional discipline of academic philosophy and is able to draw upon the works of thinkers which, although not necessarily presented in coherent, systematic form, are certainly philosophical in that they raise philosophical questions. Ultimately, the question cannot be defined in abstract. As Hegel said, you only learn how to swim by jumping in the river. The best way to answer the question 'what is philosophy?' is to jump into the writings of the philosophers themselves, taking in a wide range.

'The unexamined life is not worth living' (Socrates c469-399 BC).

Pythagoras is reputed to have been the first man to call himself a philosopher. He distinguished himself from those who called themselves wise (*sophos*), by calling himself a philosopher, not a wise man but a *lover of wisdom*. Just as Francophiles love France, philatelists love stamps, philologists love learning and literature and philanthropists love humanity, so philosophers love wisdom. The word philosophy comes from the Greek: *philo*, meaning 'love of', and *sophia*, meaning 'wisdom'. However, whilst philatelists love stamps and Francophiles love France and the French, philosophers do not agree as to the nature of the wisdom they are supposed to love. In fact, 'do not agree' is putting it mildly. Philosophers are a disagreeable bunch, on the whole. The questioning, critical attitude means that philosophy is characterised more by *disagreement* than by agreement. Wherever one comes across a hair, rest assured there will be a philosopher trying to split it.

In order to develop the sense of why philosophy matters and why it is an indispensable aspect of civilised life, the argument presented in this book bases itself firmly on Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The book offers much more than a potted guide to the branches and schools of philosophy, still less does it offer a collection of quotes which can be memorised and repeated. One reason why Plato banned poetry from his ideal city-state in the *Republic* is that people would quote Homer and Hesiod as ready made arguments, taking ideas on authority instead of taking the trouble to think for oneself. Certainly, there are plenty of quotes here, and from heavyweights like Plato

and Kant. The intention is to inspire further investigation and independent thought. Much will be disagreeable, troubling, outrageous even. The brave soldiers of science will no doubt be upset when the limitations of empirical explanation are exposed. The world is an odd place, the people in it are even odder. So the truth is likely also to be odd, and philosophers odder still. Since philosophy is not a unified discipline, but comprises different branches and schools, it is simply impossible to do justice to a wide range of philosophical opinion in a work such as this. Rather than achieve breadth at the expense of depth, a selective approach is adopted which allows greater investigation of certain themes and ideas.

An important point to grasp about philosophy is that it is not primarily about knowledge. Indeed, it is not about knowledge at all, but *intelligence*, the ability to think about and think through problems. The principal concern of philosophy is not to find a branch, a school or a philosopher and ingest a whole body of thought, proceeding to defend it against all comers, but to develop a critical outlook and orientation with respect to the material - to have the courage to think for oneself. The main purpose here has been to link certain key thoughts and thinkers together in a broad theme that indicates the enduring importance of philosophy. Accordingly, comments and explanations are brief. The bulk of these ideas are complex and require an essay, a chapter or a book in themselves to do them justice. There is not the space to do this here. Thus, apart from aiming to be inspiring and informative, the purpose of the book is to encourage further investigation and further thought. As will become clear in the section on Socrates, the purpose is not to *learn* philosophy, but to *do* it.

(I have written at length on some of the philosophers contained in this book elsewhere. Rousseau: Autonomy, Authenticity and Authority (2003); *Habermas and the Rational Utopia* 2001; *Hegel and the Embodiment of Freedom* 2001; *Marx and Rational Freedom* 2001; *Spinoza and the Rule of Reason* 2001; *Kant and the Architectonics of Reason* 2001; *Kant and the End of Rational Nature* 2007; *The Rational Freedom of Plato and Aristotle* 2001; *Aristotle and the Public Good* 1995; *Plato: the Architect of Rational Freedom*).

A narrow definition of what philosophy is - a systematic, technical approach to certain issues and ideas - produces an academically-approved list of those deemed to merit the designation 'true' philosopher. There are good reasons for

this narrow definition, in that it gives students the substantial body of philosophical work to cohere around. But an expansive definition, comprising thoughts of philosophical import wherever they come from, makes for a much more lively and pertinent approach. There is no reason why Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Hume, Kant and Bentham, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, should not be supplemented by the arguments and ideas of scientists, theologians, psychologists, anthropologists, writers, artists, architects, musicians and a whole host of others. The likes of Erasmus, Lewis Mumford, Kandinsky, William Blake, Bateson, Galileo and many more may not be considered to be philosophers, but they have certainly made contributions which have shaped philosophy. The inclusion of a Jung or a Freud or a Picasso doesn't mean that they should be renamed philosophers, simply that they have, in one form or another, made a contribution to issues which could be considered philosophical. Hence they belong in the pantheon of philosophy in its more expansive sense. And philosophy is all the stronger for being able to assimilate ideas and concepts from outside of the discipline. It should always be born in mind that in the course of history, philosophy has embraced natural science, religion, politics, economics and ethics. One can find the disciplines of physics, biology, politics, ethics, religion, ecology, psychology, sociology, and economics in Aristotle alone. The modern differentiation into separate disciplines has made it seem as though philosophy simply concerns a linguistic analysis establishing the principles of valid reasoning, but it has always meant more than this.

This book is not a succinct and to the point introduction to the key ideas of philosophy and to the principal arguments of the greatest philosophers. Even an apparently simple objective such as this begs further questions as to what counts as 'key' and why, who are the greatest philosophers and why? There is always a danger of sacrificing depth in order to achieve width. Sometimes, width is precisely what is required, covering the greatest ground in the shortest space and giving a concise introduction. The approach taken here is different, taking a particular view of philosophy, identifying some of the key figures and ideas in this tradition, and going deeply into some of the crucial areas. One of the dangers of width is that it can simplify philosophy to such an extent that it appears mere quibbling. Something essential is lost in the translation. So there is

merit in Hegel's point about having to jump into the river in order to learn how to swim. Then again, John Wayne in *The Shootist* warned 'never jump into a river until you know how deep it is'. It is perfectly possible to drown. The reasoning is that it is the deep waters that provokes thought and stimulates further questioning.

Anyone who attempts to write generally about 'philosophy' as such is asking for trouble, and usually finds it. A philosopher should know better. Bertrand Russell knew well that the man who generalises generally lies. That didn't stop him from publishing *A History of Western Philosophy*. It was a compelling read that got many, myself included, interested in philosophy. And the more I read the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, the more I realised that Russell was just plain wrong in many of the things he said about these philosophers. He admitted that with the possible exception of Leibniz, there are scholars who will know more about every philosopher in his *History* than he does. There never is a final word, only an invitation to further study. Aristotle's last ever book breaks off at the end with the words come, let us philosophize...

What is offered here is a very broad definition of philosophy and the philosophers who, from the perspective of the approach set out from the first, are among the most interesting and significant. This is far from being a definitive selection. The emphasis is upon a particular line of argument, which is why Spinoza and Descartes are shown in relation to Kant and Hegel, but Locke and Hume – crucial philosophers of the highest order - are out. The work is an introduction not in the sense of giving an overview of the work of each major philosopher or school, but in developing a certain line of argument in the hope of showing why philosophy matters and inspiring many to take the plunge into Hegel's river. In fine, the question answered is not principally the usual 'what is philosophy?' Rather, the question is 'why philosophy?' Why do philosophy? Why engage in something so difficult and abstruse? The purpose is to excite and inspire, give good reasons as to why philosophy matters.

2 ETHOS, LOGOS AND MYTHOS

Before going any further, the idea of philosophy as *ethos* requires clarification. There is plenty of talk these days about a philosophy that ‘works’. Read Rorty and some such notion beyond right and wrong, truth and falsehood is apparent. In the general retreat from metaphysics, truth is excoriated as Truth, as some all-pervasive, elitist, monolithic body of ideas and values which is oppressive of individual liberty. Ideas are selected from the likes of Plato – the philosopher-ruler – or Rousseau – the individual is forced to be free – and made to fit a libertarian narrative highlighting the totalitarian implications of rational philosophy. This is caricature. Postmodernism is currently up a creek without a paddle, as could have been anticipated. Rudderless from the first, it always lacked direction and now flounders on the rocks.

The version of *ethos* presented in this book is not of this character but, instead, takes metaphysics and ethics seriously. Philosophy as *ethos* remains philosophy and is not just a practice, a custom, a habit, a way of life. It is philosophy, entailing a commitment to the truth, the good and the beautiful, as a way of life. A philosophical *ethos* is a commitment to realise philosophy, to make philosophy worldly and to make the world philosophical.

Much of the talk about truth, reason, and right these days is facile. In our relativistic age, we think that all such concepts *should* be easy to understand and readily accessible to each and all. They are accessible, but only to those who use their rational faculties, to those who, in the words of Kant, have the courage to use their understanding. Philosophy is difficult. Of course it is. It is not just about popular and conventional notions concerning an existing way of life. This is habit and custom, being socialised according to prevailing norms and values. That may make for a good citizen of the state, but it doesn’t necessarily make for a good human being. As Aristotle argued, it is perfectly possible for a man to be a good citizen and a bad human being. Philosophy is interested in politics, in the practical dimension of the true and the good, but more than this it concerns the true and the good for human beings as such. In defining philosophy as *ethos*, there is a danger of reducing philosophy to cultural norms, habits and customs. Human beings tend to tame and domesticate philosophy’s exacting standards and make them fit a prevailing culture and society. Since Socrates, philosophers have been mavericks and outsiders, trouble-

makers sentenced to death or exiled for the way that they undermine existing and generally accepted standards of good and bad, right and wrong. Philosophers have been threats to existing norms and ways of life. The people themselves as much as rulers have turned upon philosophers for this reason. Long before Socrates was sentenced to death in democratic Athens, Pythagoras and his supporters were chased from government in the Greek isles where they had set up. So the idea of philosophy as *ethos* begs the question, what kind of way of life? The answer is clear, the philosophical way of life. Which, in turn, begs the question with which we began, what is philosophy? What is this philosophy we are expected to live up to in our everyday lives?

For all of our scientific and technological achievement, our philosophical thinking is remarkably undeveloped. There is even a sense that our reliance upon physical means and technical power has not only displaced a concern with ends, but actually atrophied our philosophical capabilities. Instead of thinking, we transfer responsibility to things, to technics and economic growth or to some other such notion. In many respects, the modern forces of state power, bureaucracy, capital, commodities and money, have become new gods, with philosophical notions of the true, the good and the beautiful being profoundly reworked or simply jettisoned for being irrelevant to the imperatives of the idols of the modern age. Here, philosophy is completely at odds with the instrumental, exploitative and alienative way of life of the modern age. That doesn't show the redundancy of philosophy. On the contrary, that shows that we need philosophy more than we have ever done.

Philosophy, of course, is a very difficult, cerebral discipline. Philosophers have written reams and disputed endlessly about notions of form and substance, what there is, what we know and how we know it, what constitutes right and so on. And whilst the greatest minds have made it clear that truth, goodness and beauty exist, there is a dispute as to whether these qualities inhere in the objective world as such, with the role of philosophy being their intellectual appreciation, or are the constructs of the human conceptual apparatus imposed upon the world, with the role of philosophy being the clarification of these concepts. My view is that this dispute derives from a subject-object dualism that can be rejected. There is a correspondence and coherence

between the two approaches. Human beings are not unearthly, unnatural beings squatting outside of physical reality but are a part of everything they see around them. Human beings are natural beings, a part of nature. The conceptual apparatus that is innate to human beings, then, is part of the true, the good and the beautiful that inheres in the natural order and not something apart from and imposed upon that order from the outside. The intellectual appreciation of natural order, then, is part of the process by which human beings use and develop their innate rational capacities to realise the true, the good and the beautiful.

The idea that there is a correspondence between the conceptual apparatus innate to human beings and the true, the good and the beautiful that inheres in Nature comes with the corollary that a perfect harmony between subject and object is possible. For Kant, the subject here is not individual human beings, but the human species as a whole. I shall address Kant's argument at length later on.

There are many that would deny such a harmony, arguing that the map provided by human concepts can never be the same thing as the territory. This perspective recognises that our attempts to portray the natural order by means of our ideas are bound to fall short of that order. These ideas about the natural order are human constructs, not the natural order itself, and are therefore bound to be inadequate. Ideas in this sense approximate reality as a whole and can err in that approximation. Philosophy is a form of mental exercise that seeks to undermine normal patterns of thought and speech and practice so as to help human beings achieve a greater appreciation of the natural order and their place within it. Whether that greater appreciation can ever be the complete comprehension of the natural order depends upon the extent to which one believes that the subject-object dualism can ever be resolved. Later, I shall discuss at length Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei* – the intellectual love of God/Nature, *Deus sive Natura*.

If philosophy is not just *ethos*, in that it involves a rational commitment to the true, the good and the beautiful, neither does philosophy concern the simply rational. Philosophy mediates between science and religion in this respect. It is worth examining this notion with respect to *mythos* and *logos*.

The ancient Greeks made a distinction between *mythos* and *logos* as two essential but different ways of thinking and acquiring knowledge. (Eliade 1994). For the Greeks, *mythos* and *logos* were not antagonistic, in the way that religion and science are now considered to be antagonistic, but complemented each other's truths whilst remaining in their own legitimate sphere of competence. *Logos* refers to 'reason' and is the practical mode of thought that enables human beings to manipulate and control their environment. *Logos* is based upon the correspondence of our notions to external reality and evinces a foresight that has been crucial to the survival and flourishing of the human species.

Logos, however, speaks to only one aspect of human nature. It can deliver truth and control with respect to the environment, but not meaning with respect to life's trials and tribulations. For this meaning, human beings turn to *mythos*.

The most salient characteristic of the modern world is that it combines a wealth of means with a confusion of ends. We live in a society of scientific reason and moral meaninglessness, which is not a happy condition. In this sense, *logos* has triumphed at the expense of *mythos*, with an instrumental and utilitarian approach to the world prevailing over other essential aspects of the human ontology. (Huizinga 1949: 5-25). The result is that despite a vast accumulation of material quantity, there has been a remarkable increase in the modern malaise of depression, originally called melancholy. Barbara Ehrenreich calls this 'An Epidemic of Melancholy' (Ehrenreich ch 7 2008).

Mythos is a form of psychology which delivers meaning with regard to those elusive, perplexing and often tragic aspects of the human predicament that are beyond the realm of *logos*. In the terms of modernity, *logos* delivers the material goods, but it does not deliver meaning. Unlike *logos*, *mythos* does not concern empirical fact, physical explanations of cause and effect, but attempts to access and canalise in a positive and healthy way the deeper regions of the psyche which influence human thought and behaviour in a profound way (Smith 1991: 235).

The word 'psyche' derives from the Greek for the soul. In this respect, it is no surprise that Freud and Jung turned to ancient myths in their attempts to put the examination of the human psyche on a scientific basis. Freud and Jung were engaged in nothing less than the scientific search for the soul. Hence the title of one of

Jung's most famous books, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (2001). Also of interest in this respect is Bettelheim's *Freud and Man's Soul* (Bettelheim 2001).

These comments on *logos* and *mythos* shed some light on the controversy as to whether Freud and Jung were engaged in real science or inventing a new mythology. It depends upon how one defines 'real science'. The questions that Freud and Jung pursued cannot be answered by empirical evidence under laboratory conditions. Not all human truths can. Freud and Jung were doing a bit of both and this was bound to be controversial in modern conditions that have severed fact and value so sharply.

One should be careful not to read *logos* and *mythos* in terms of the antagonism between science and religion. A *mythos* is not the same thing as belief as such. A *mythos* is only plausible to the extent that belief in it is backed by a certain correspondence to reality. A *mythos* has to ring true; it has to satisfy the thirst for meaning and thus answer the deep questions that human beings ask of it. A *mythos* is essentially a design for life which prepares the spiritual or psychological ground for human beings to go on and make the 'truth' embodied in myth a reality in their lives. Ultimately, the only way to verify the value and truth of myth is to act upon it. Much has been written about the scientific status or otherwise of Marx's 'scientific socialism'. Popper is clear that Marxism is a pseudo-science in that its main propositions cannot be falsified. (That Darwinism and Freudianism can be criticised for the same reasons indicates that there may be something far too narrow and restrictive in Popper's criteria for what constitutes real science. Since Kuhn and Feyerabend, we have adopted a much more anarchic conception of scientific method). But Marx sheds interesting light on this relation between *logos* and *mythos*. In thesis II on Feuerbach, Marx writes:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.

This is a call for human beings to live up to their reason, to realise the philosophical ideal without by exercising the rational capacity that is innate within them. Marx's praxis is not the same thing as pragmatism. Marx is not simply arguing the pragmatic case that something is true because it works. His praxis is the unity of theory and practice, the incorporation of the philosophical ideal into practice and the realisation of this ideal in and through practice. In this sense, Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis is the combination of both *logos* and *mythos*. It emphasises the human species as the maker of its own reality. Put into practice, the philosophical ideal is both *logos* and *mythos* in revealing something profoundly true about our essential humanity.

There is a need to be clear here. In arguing for philosophy as *ethos*, as praxis, as a way of life, one has to be careful to distinguish philosophy from religion. Religion is not primarily a body of beliefs, a theology, an intellectual appreciation of all that exists but a practice, something that people do rather than think. Religion may therefore be defined as a way of life. Atheists like Richard Dawkins spectacularly miss the point when they bring the weapons of scientific reason to bear upon religious beliefs, as though religion rests on the quality of its intellectual propositions. These beliefs, even the highest achievements of theology – and these have been high, much higher than Dawkins is capable of appreciating – are rationalisations of truths acquired by practical action. Criticism of these beliefs do not dent the meaning that this action brings to believers. It may be a controversial point, but many believers would be hard pressed to state, let alone explain, their beliefs in anything like a coherent intellectual fashion. It can be done, and theologians have done it. But in an important sense, it doesn't matter.

I like what Kenneth Clark argues with respect to the remarkable success of the Catholic response to the challenge of the Reformation.

The leaders of the Catholic Restoration had made the inspired decision not to go half-way to meet Protestantism in any of its objections, but rather to glory in those very doctrines that the Protestants had most forcibly, and sometimes, it must be admitted, most logically, repudiated. Luther had repudiated the authority of the Pope: very well, no pains must be spared in making a giant assertion that St

Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, had been divinely appointed as Christ's Vicar on earth. Ever since Erasmus, intelligent men in the north had spoken scornfully of relics: very well, their importance must be magnified, so that the four piers of St Peter's itself are gigantic reliquaries. One of them contained part of the lance that pierced Our Lord's side, and in front of it stands Bernini's figure of Longinus looking up with a gesture of dazzled enlightenment. The veneration of relics was connected with the cult of the saints, and this had been equally condemned by the reformers. Very well, the saints should be made more insistently real to the imagination and in particular their sufferings and their ecstasies should be vividly recorded.

Clark *Civilisation* 1969: 180-2

The supposed 'superstition' of the Catholic Church succeeded against the logic and reason of the Reformation precisely because it addressed a psychic need and longing and thereby spoke a deeper truth. The greatest art, music, poetry and literature do this, a point that continually escapes the apparently clever men and women of science. Clark points out that the Catholic revival was a popular movement, giving 'ordinary people a means of satisfying, through ritual, images and symbols, their deepest impulses, so that their minds were at peace'. And this, Clark reasons, defines civilisation. 'In all these ways the Church gave imaginative expression to deep-seated human impulses.'

Religion is not science, religious knowledge is not scientific knowledge. To examine religious texts as if they were statements of truth gained by experiment and subject to empirical verification is to commit a category mistake of the crudest kind. It is pointless criticising an apple for not being a pear, but that is what some scientists, whose atheism gets the better of their reason, continually do. Religion is something that people do to invest their lives with meaning. It is pointless criticising intellectual errors in religious doctrines and beliefs. The bulk of religious practitioners will neither know nor care about the precise nature of those rationalisations in the first place.

Religion is not an instruction booklet that one learns and then puts into practice, it's something that one does and lives by. Hence the profundity of Hegel's claim that you only learn how to swim by jumping in the river. In the 1970's there was a public information film in Britain which ended with the words 'learn to swim, young man, learn to swim'. You learn to swim by getting in the water, not by reading an instruction manual. You cannot learn to lay bricks, fix cars, or bake cakes by memorising texts or reading recipes. Any game, from chess to pinball, seems difficult and abstruse when reading its rules, but soon make sense when it is played. There are many things in life that can only be learned by practice. Through dedication and perseverance, an individual can achieve something that appears impossible at the level of thought. Instead of sinking to the bottom of the river, an individual can swim. At the level of thought, an individual may be more inclined to believe that something is impossible. In practice, mind and body are integrated in a way that bypasses conscious, calculated, rational deliberation. Learning may be defined as a change in behaviour. In this way, through practice, an individual learns to overcome a prior reasoned incapability and instead achieve feats in performance that can bring an indefinable joy. Aristotle argued that you are what you repeatedly do. A drone is what he or she repeatedly does. Aristotle's ethic is much higher than this, however. Stated more accurately, then, a human being becomes what he or she repeatedly does. Aristotle was committed to the best, *ariste*, an aristocracy of talent, merit and achievement. The music instrument should go to the best musician. Human beings should aspire to be the best that they could be. Aristotle was committed to excellence, human beings becoming what they have the potential to be.

This is philosophy at the level of practice. Philosophy is committed to ideals of truth, goodness and beauty which are independent of the customs, habits and practices of particular times and places. Philosophy as *ethos* conceives philosophy to be a practical discipline that enjoins human beings to act and learn and thus develop new capacities of mind and body. This is the central message of this book. One can agree with Marx that 'The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.' This does not imply that the great questions of logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics, language are to be jettisoned for mere

practice, reducing philosophy to habits, customs and practices relative to a prevailing way of life. It is simply to say that the two go together.

Socrates brought philosophy down to earth and, in so doing, emphasised that philosophy is a way of life *to be lived as philosophy*. There is little point in cogitating endlessly upon the teachings of philosophy in order to judge their truth or falsehood, without committing to and embarking upon a philosophical way of life. The most fertile ideas grow up and leave home, they have an influence upon and thus change the wider world. Ideas may be generated 'up in the clouds', but to be effective, they come down to earth. This was Socrates' achievement. Marx again is pertinent here:

One has to "leave philosophy aside" (Wigand), one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality, for which there exists also an enormous amount of literary material, unknown, of course, to the philosophers. . . . Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love.

Marx *The German Ideology* 1999

Words built on words built on words is merely a castle made out of sand. The truth or otherwise of philosophical musings can only be demonstrated by their being translated into political, social or ethical practice, forming part of an action that is effective and enduring in being plausible and believable, in meeting human needs and delivering meaning in relation to the environment.

So what's the point?

I believe in a moral and scientific truth, in a reality that is, if not objective in the sense of some external, impersonal datum, then is no less real in being intelligible. Rather than attach oneself to the particulars of place, person, custom and interest, philosophy speaks of a truth that is bigger than you or I, a truth that transcends time and place. This reality is beyond subject and object in any dualistic sense but in some way fuses them both in an intelligibility.

But, it may be objected, so too does religion in this very general sense. Religion, too, is an ethos, a way of life, a lived experience that sinks the ego in something

bigger than you and I. To call for philosophy to be realised as a lived experience is not, however, the same thing as arguing that philosophy as such is a lived experience.

The Daoists viewed religion as a 'knack' which is acquired by constant practice. From this perspective, there is little point trying to understand religion in terms of its teachings. From a Daoist perspective, well done is better than well said. Zhuangzi (370-311 BCE) cites the carpenter Bian: 'When I work on a wheel, if I hit too softly, pleasant as this is, it doesn't make for a good wheel. If I hit it furiously, I get tired and the thing doesn't work! So not too soft, not too vigorous. I grasp it in my hand and hold it in my heart. I cannot express this by word of mouth, I just know it.' (Eliade 1960: 59-60; Eliade 1958: 216-19; 267-72.). When the golfer Jack Nicklaus was asked what he was thinking as he putted the final ball to win some world championship, he replied 'nothing'. In Daoist terms, he had so perfected his powers through practice and concentration that he was capable of losing himself in the task, his hands seemingly moving by their own volition, without the power of conscious thought and deliberation. Nicklaus had 'acquired' the knack through continuous practice. This 'nothing' at the level of thought is a self-forgetfulness, what Zhuangzi describes as an *ekstasis* that makes it possible to 'step outside' the prism of ego in order to experience the divine. (Eliade 1958: 156/85).

Individuals who acquire this knack are capable of discovering a transcendent dimension to life. This is more than an external reality but corresponds in some way to the deepest level of the human ontology. It has meaning at the level of Being. This reality beyond the external, sensuous world is what Daoists call the unnameable. It is the Dao, Brahman, Nirvana, God. This ultimate reality is beyond physical existence and is not accessible to *logos*. At this point, we have left the realms of science and philosophy. Or is this the only form that the realisation of the true, the good and the beautiful could take? Is this not Being?

The Daoists have a saying that 'he who says, does not know; he who knows, does not say'. In which case, the truth of philosophy and science cannot be stated and communicated and proven. The truth becomes a feeling which is *experienced*. Such imprecision may deny the rational projects of science and philosophy but lies at the basis of religion in bringing an *ekstasis* that exalts practitioners above and beyond the narrowing confines of the ego.

So there is a distinction to be made here. Philosophically oriented knowledge seeks to understand reality and establish its meaning; scientifically oriented knowledge seeks to explain reality and bring it within the domain of reason. But the greatest of philosophers have always sought to establish the limits of our knowledge. Religion, like art and music and literature, understands that the unknown and the unknowable form an integral part of the human experience and have been an enduring source of joy, wonder and tranquillity throughout the ages.

There are many debates in philosophy which, after centuries, remain unresolved. Plato thought form and matter were distinct, Aristotle thought that form inheres in matter. Raphael's painting *The School of Athens* characterises this ongoing philosophical debate.



In the centre, Plato the mathematician points upwards to the evidence of intelligent design within the universe as a whole; Aristotle the biologist points downwards to the earth and the way that organic life forms evolve and flourish.

The debate continues. Scientists with a mathematical background claim to have found evidence of design in the universe (S Conway Morris *Life's Solution* 2003; Brian Greene *The Fabric of the Cosmos* 2005; Carl Johan Calleman 2009 *The Purposeful Universe*). Scientists with a biological background point to accident and natural selection (Victor Stenger 2003 *Has Science Found God?*; Christian de Duve *Life Evolving* 2002; S Rose *Lifelines - Biology, Freedom, Determinism* 1997).

More than two millennia after Plato and Aristotle, the question remains *How Blind is the Watchmaker?* (Neil Broom 1998 Intervarsity). At some point we need to ask whether the question can ever be solved. I amuse friends and irritate enemies with my budgerigar theory of knowledge and its limits. A budgerigar knows what it needs to know and no more. A budgerigar cannot split an atom and has no conception of what an atom is. A budgerigar flourishes well within the limits of its cognitive abilities. There is a world beyond the cognitive reach of the budgerigar. The budgerigar doesn't know this and doesn't need to know this. My point is this, it is pure human conceit for us to think that our knowledge of the external world is or ever could be the complete knowledge of that world. Our knowledge of the external world is *our knowledge*, limited as it is, and not the external world as such. It could well be, in fine, that when the same questions have been endlessly debated without resolution, human beings may well have reached their cognitive limits.

However, unlike budgerigars, human beings do not settle for the confines of those limits, but continue to ask questions. The human mind seems to be distinguished from the minds of other animals by the ability to generate ideas and seek experiences that exceed the conceptual reach of human beings. Human beings constantly ask questions that go beyond conceptual limits, with the result that the mind seems ever susceptible to the transcendent. This is where religion, like art and music, does its best work, as a sensuous experience rather than as a cerebral discipline. Religion, art, music speak to that ineliminable, essential part of human experience that goes beyond the 'limits of reason'. (Eliade 1958: 38—58). This is a realm that provokes 'resonances in our bodies at levels deeper than will or consciousness'. (Otto 1923: 5-41.)

There is, of course, a cerebral component in religion, art and music, seen most clearly in the relation to mathematical form. What is called 'the Golden Ratio' seems to be innate in nature and the universe and is reproduced in the finest

examples of human art and architecture. Rational activity in this sense blends seamlessly with transcendence to go beyond the reach of language. Such reason is innate, almost ineffable, in being just there in a world where subjective and objective become one.

The ability of the human mind continuously exceed its conceptual grasp, giving human beings an enduring tendency to transcendence. Human beings have an innate predisposition to push their ideas and beliefs to the extreme and beyond. Ultimately, there is nowhere else to go but the transcendent.

This is something we need to be aware of and learn to understand. It is an ineliminable aspect of human nature. This does not mean that those ideas and beliefs are right. On the contrary, we need to be ever sceptical, alert to the dangers of wishful thinking and the mess that human beings can get themselves into by investing their existence with transcendental meaning. Human beings develop their culture, their institutions and their practices over time, as they attempt to increase their control over their environments. Human beings are meaning-seeking, rule-following animals by nature. This is reason to be cautious and sceptical when it comes to the world of value. Human beings have a will to believe. Sigmund Freud was resigned to the fact that even after psychology has achieved all it can achieve, human beings will tend to believe what they want to believe. If human beings have a natural tendency to conform to the rules, institutions and practices of the society in which they live, so are they inclined to entrench those social arrangements with transcendent meaning and value. This will to believe reveals nothing of the veracity of the transcendent meaning and value human beings find in the world. Philosophy is not about any old meaning, and philosophers have frequently fallen foul for having challenged prevailing social norms and values.

Human beings are meaning seeking creatures, and a viable social order needs to speak to that aspect of human nature. But – and this is where philosophy comes in – social norms and rules are not right simply on account of being invested with transcendent meaning and value. The value of philosophy lies in weighing the standards of good, right, truth and value rather than simply accepting those norms and values that prevail in particular times and places.

That said, philosophy amounts to more than the policing of belief, language and meaning. Alfred North Whitehead was surely correct when he argued: "But if men cannot live on bread alone, still less can they do so on disinfectants."

To think that this aspiration to the transcendent can be undermined by reason, logic and evidence is a crude eighteenth century error likely to rebound in spectacular fashion, bringing about the opposite of the rational world sought. Many scientists nevertheless commit this error, exhibiting a coldness that is frankly inhumane and unlikely to issue in a civilisation that is at peace. Take these blunt words from Victor Stenger:

I do not think science has to make any apologies. It looks at the world and tells it like it is. And we all live longer, better lives because of this dispassionate view. Sure, it commands awe and provides inspiration. Still, I would rather be operated on by a surgeon who sees me as an assemblage of atoms than one who lovingly tries to manipulate what he or she imagines are my vital energy fields. Dawkins himself has been particularly eloquent in getting across the message that science does not paint a picture of a universe that always fulfills human wishes. Indeed, it paints a more wondrous sight that goes far beyond human fantasies and petty concerns.

Stenger 2003 ch 6

It is not that Stenger is wrong on any of these points. Indeed, there is plenty to be said that the scientific view encourages a sane and sober approach to life in helping us locate our place within a much bigger universe, deflating our sense of self-importance. It's the way that Stenger expresses himself that is worrying. There have been too many occasions in the past when scientists have found it all too easy to take the step from this sober assessment of 'man's place in nature' to acting as though human beings really are insignificant. Later, I shall have cause to discuss the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, where the Nazis planned the 'final solution to the Jewish question'. More than half of those present carried the title 'doctor'. So I worry when I read scientists dismiss the awe and inspiration of art, music, poetry and

religion and I worry even more when they are quick to dismiss 'human fantasies and petty concerns'. It all depends. We have learned the hard way to distrust the notion that science has all the answers.

It would be incorrect to claim that the truths of religion as a way of life are 'made up', 'fantasies' in some crude sense. This is a straw man. A *mythos* is not, as some contemporary atheistic scientists imply, comprised of mere fairy tales. A *mythos* speaks to an essential part of human nature. This was Clark's explanation for the success of the Catholic Renaissance in response to the logic and reason of the Reformation. Transcendence is grounded in the reality of the human psyche and ontology. It is the very nature of human being. In his *Idea of the Holy* (1917), Rudolf Otto described the divine as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, an experience that makes us weak at the knees, a source of endless fascination that draws us in. This is Otto's idea of the numinous, something we experience when we are put in touch with the deep realities beyond the senses. Wishful thinking the likes of Dawkins and Stenger would shout here. It is much more than that. It is what theologian Paul Tillich calls 'Ultimate Concern', 'the Ground of our Being'.

This is fine. This shows the permanent value of religion, that part of our nature, indeed that part of our reality, that lies beyond the cognitive reach of science and philosophy. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy which deals with what we know, what we can know and how we know it. It is the height of human arrogance to think that this constitutes reality as a whole and is the sum total of human knowledge and experience. At the same time, philosophy as *ethos* remains philosophy and, as such, takes the questions of truth and knowledge and meaning seriously. These questions matter. The claim is that philosophy as *ethos* concerns the realisation of the philosophical ideal, with all that that entails with respect to the true, the good and the beautiful. Philosophy as *ethos* is more than custom and habit but affirms the need to embed the true, the good and the beautiful in a philosophical *modus vivendi*.

In fine, I have no interest in deciding between science, philosophy and religion, as though all these essential, ineliminable aspect of the human endeavour are engaged in

a war with each other. Is Stravinsky jazz or classical? Where, on earth, does one fit Goethe? It is not even a case of accepting the safe but bland conclusion that each discipline is legitimate in its own sphere. The terrain changes throughout history. Much that was once the preserve of philosophy and religion has been claimed by science. There is always a cross-fertilization at work, and each discipline learns from and responds to the other. Only the dullest of minds are concerned with a turf war.

3 WHY PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophy has been described as being 'brain-breakingly' difficult. It's difficult to do and difficult to read. C.E.M. Joad, a former professor of philosophy, once wrote that 'most books on philosophy are unintelligible to most intelligent people' and that 'over half of what passes for philosophy is unreadable'. (Joad 1957). An awful lot is left unread.

There is no way of simplifying philosophy in order to make it easy, not even at an introductory level. Philosophy is a difficult subject; that is its value and its attraction. It is also why it repels. There is, however, no value and no point in making philosophy easy. Easy philosophy is not philosophy at all. Not the least reason why philosophy is so difficult is because it entails a sound understanding of a whole range of other subjects. Stephen Hawking has recently argued that philosophy has been eclipsed since philosophers have been unable to keep up with the advances in mathematics. So too have many mathematicians if it comes to that. This is a point of general significance. Many disciplines are becoming so specialised that only a handful of experts *can* follow the debates at the cutting edge. It is telling that in the rest of his book, Hawking engages in such philosophical discussions as, to take one instance, freedom and determinism, that are barely up to the level of an A level philosophy student. Similarly, his much quoted observations on God are familiar, even trite. Hawking's criticism can be met directly. Philosophy does not require expertise in physics, biology and mathematics, history, sociology, politics and economics, religion and mythology, aesthetics and literature. It does require a good understanding of all these subjects and, above all, an ability to identify and weigh the key arguments and areas in these subjects, working out their overall meaning. Biology and theology, physics

and aesthetics, psychology and history, mathematics and literature — these are all intermittent grist to the philosopher's mill, and anyone who aspires to be a philosopher must have an acquaintance with them. Hawking's point that cutting edge expertise is required in mathematics begs the question, are philosophers expected to be experts in all the other disciplines also? The question only needs to be put for its inadequacies to be revealed. Or does Hawking really mean that mathematics is the principal and maybe the sole source of truth, with all other disciplines just so much noise? Some mathematicians claim to have found evidence of intelligent design in the mathematical arrangement of the universe. Other mathematicians deny this. Which is true? If mathematicians cannot decide this, who can and how?

In addition to the broad range of knowledge and understanding required, philosophy is extremely abstract. Philosophy is about more than general meaning and significance. Many people will not only be put-off but will be plainly excluded from a discipline which pushes reason to its outer limits, attempts to find the dividing line between knowledge and belief, goes to painstaking lengths to determine precisely what we can know, makes the most hair-splitting distinctions, engages in the most abstract of thinking, and draws conclusions so remote from what non-philosophers naively call 'the real world' that it cannot but seem irrelevant to the mundane affairs and interests of ordinary life. Philosophy is designed to show that the real world is anything but what we think we see, touch, feel. To a philosopher, the ordinary world is anything but ordinary. That is its point. Like the real world, philosophy is not easily comprehensible. This is something 'ordinary' people, whose minds are adjusted to the familiar — but maybe false — contours of the 'ordinary' world neither like nor understand. They are not curious, and therefore they are not philosophers. I once complained to an academic — I'd better not say who — about how difficult I was finding my research, only to be told that 'if you want to be ordinary, go and do what ordinary people do. Philosophy is not for everybody'. The statement seems plainly to identify philosophy as an elitist, a non-, even anti-democratic pursuit, doomed to failure since 'everybody' would seem destined to remain 'ordinary' in never using their reason. The perspective developed in this book challenges this notion of philosopher-kings. (And to be fair, the academic in question would too). However, it does so not by diluting the difficulty of philosophy but by arguing that all can come to use their reason and become philosophers. The point is that philosophy is abstract,

difficult and can seem so out of kilter with what most people understand to be the 'real world' as to put most people off.

the absence of agreed results—all these cannot but seem to many at best a monument of energy misplaced, at worst an irritating perversion of the powers and faculties of the human mind.

Joad 1957: 10

This book doesn't just aim to show what philosophy is but to indicate why philosophy matters and how it can be a life affirming, life changing experience – even for, indeed, especially for, 'ordinary people'. Philosophy, no matter how difficult and unreadable, abstract and unintelligible, is worth doing. Hopefully, in doing philosophy, people who 'live in the real world' will come at last to understand just what that real world is, coming to understand that the world in which they ordinarily live is anything but as it appears. In understanding more of the real world around them, people will come to understand more of themselves. The words 'know thyself' are inscribed at the site of the Oracle of Delphi. 'The unexamined life is not worth living' argued Socrates and Plato. "The noblest of all studies is the study of what man should be and what he should pursue" (*Plato, Gorgias, 487*). That is the response to those who call upon those who have embarked upon the philosophical quest to stop questioning and come and live in the real world. 'You only get one life'. A philosopher more than anyone knows this. But a philosopher knows that this one life comes with a range of possibilities. Those contented in their blissful ignorance know only the one possibility. At the heart of philosophy is this anthropological and ontological concern with what human beings are, could and should be, and should pursue for a flourishing life.

An introduction has served its purpose if it encourages people to explore the writings of the philosophers themselves. This book will cover a number of key philosophers – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Vico, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx. There are very many more key philosophers out there. But the main idea that this book wishes to develop is that

philosophy is *not* about learning the words of a list of great philosophers, but actually philosophising. One could draw up a list of the great – or not so great – philosophers, from the pre-Socratics to the present, and plod through them all, one by one. It would be possible to pass a few exams along the way, and even come to teach the subject. But it wouldn't actually be doing philosophy. Had any of the philosophers discussed in this book employed this approach, they would never have produced any real philosophy and would therefore have never made the list of all time great philosophers.

One of the great values of philosophy is the ability to differentiate the meaningful from the meaningless. Which isn't to say that philosophy hasn't produced a mass of linguistic dross, words which have the form of intelligence and meaning but not the content. There is always a reluctance to criticise verbiage given the uneasy feeling that one simply hasn't understood. There are thinkers at work out there who are eloquent but empty. Their words are sophisticated but never actually say anything, all grandiloquent phrases concealing a paucity of thought and meaning. This is a call to think harder. Some of the greatest of philosophers have been appalling writers. Kant is an obvious example, but there are many others. They persuade by the quality of their arguments, not their literary merit. Philosophy separates the sensical from the non-sensical. There are ways of distinguishing the true philosophy from the pseudo-philosophical.

Philosophy is not the same thing as studying the written words of dead philosophers, as though the important point is 'what Plato *really* said', 'what Marx *really* said'. This is to exchange thinking about genuine philosophical problems for pseudo-problems, inviting a myopic degeneration into an esoteric language detached from the real world at every level. For instance, I believe that Karl Popper made error after error on what Marx 'really said' in *The Open Society*, but made plenty of good points about historicism and moral futurism and the indeterminacy of the future in the process. It does matter that the views of a thinker are presented accurately, but it matters more that philosophy should address real world problems. My point is that controversies over what this or that philosopher 'really' said can go on forever, getting in the way of some real philosophising. Take this passage from Raymond Plant's Preface in his book *Hegel*

Conceived in ignorance of Hegel's philosophical achievements, Popper's discussion of Hegel is a conjecture which has had in the past, and also receives in the present work, a firm refutation. The refutation supplied in this book is, however, implicit – to have explicitly challenged Popper at each point in his interpretation would have credited his work with more importance than it deserves.

Plant is correct. Popper's understanding of Hegel in *The Open Society* – and Marx, Plato and Aristotle for that matter – is lamentable. The only thing one can do is extract his more general points, avoiding a point by point rebuttal that leaves us with what is already available – the works of the philosophers themselves.

The view that it is possible to do philosophy by studying philosophers rather than by philosophizing results in a form of philosophical inbreeding which produces something that looks like philosophy, but lacks its purpose and point. Philosophy brings new world changing, life-affirming insight to the real world, making ordinary people in the ordinary world somewhat more extra-ordinary. And here is the key point. Philosophy is not a self-contained and self-subsistent discipline but relates to the whole range of life and its concerns. A philosopher requires a sound understanding of the full range of subject disciplines embracing both the arts and the sciences. This is because the problems with which philosophers deal and which are grist to the philosophising mill originate outside of philosophy – physics, biology, mathematics, art and literature, politics and ethics, religion. And then there is social life itself, 'the real world'.

In Thesis VIII on Feuerbach, Marx argues that 'All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'.

Which implies that philosophising is also essentially practical, relating to the human practice which engenders the world and its social forms as well as to the understanding of this practice and the world it creates. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Thesis XI).

Marx argues against degeneration into philosophical inbreeding, the tendency of philosophers to enclose themselves in a world of their own and thus descend into irrelevant verbiage.

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.

Thesis II on Feuerbach

The problems of philosophy arise outside of philosophy in the world of social life. Genuine philosophising is always 'this-sided' in being rooted in social life. Philosophising withers when detached from the human roots which feed philosophy. Detached from these human roots, philosophy falls back on language, method or technique, an approach which mistakes the mere mechanics for the real thing. There is no 'key' to philosophy, it is not an instrumental discipline in this sense. Which is not to deny that the mechanics can be sufficient to pass exams, publish papers and books and secure academic posts. However, in philosophy the instruments are secondary in the pursuit of meaningful arguments and conclusions. It is not the instruments that matter but the problems that inspire the philosophical mind. Having given Karl Popper such a hard time earlier, it is only fair to mention that these observations are all points that he himself emphasised.

Philosophy begins in wonder, claimed Plato. To be a philosopher is to have the gift of wonder. Not all possess the philosophical mind. Most philosophers have been asked 'why do you keep questioning things?' How else would you know the world and who you are? Many plainly don't want to know; they are content with the life that is not worth living. Einstein emphasised that the important thing is to keep questioning, but many do not see the point. They merely exist. They lack the gift of wonder. They are the puppets absorbed in the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave. As Bronowski argued, to get a pertinent answer it is often necessary to ask an impertinent question. The philosophers are those who have a passion for finding and solving problems,

and they do this by asking the right questions. Philosophy is not just about questioning, most of all it is about right questioning. In the way that they frame questions, philosophers render the world of the familiar and the settled problematic, something which disturbs those who have long since come to terms with their existence. Philosophers remind the puppets that existence is not living and the puppets are disquieted. Good. They need to be. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Oscar Wilde writes: ‘Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent among them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation’.

Later, we shall see that Kant argued that the role of the philosopher lies in goading human beings into using their rational faculties, thus advancing the human species towards the end of freedom. Kant would not describe the philosopher as an agitator, but philosophers have caused an awful lot of trouble since Socrates.

Philosophers do their best work when they address problems relating to the real, social, practical world, irrespective of the sophistication or otherwise of their instruments. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom rather than the application of instruments. Those who emphasise terms, techniques and methods as against, and in abstraction from, issues and problems originating in ‘the real world’ may produce exercises in fashionable and eloquent cleverness, but they sideline philosophy into a cul-de-sac of pseudo-problems and verbal games; philosophy becomes little more than a crossword or a jigsaw, putting things back into their correct form but changing and understanding nothing of what results. There is no pretence of changing anything, nothing to be understood. Science will make hay of such impotent philosophy. This is a philosophy that is irrelevant. Long before Hawking, theoretical physics and mathematics, philosophy had rendered itself irrelevant by its myopic focus on the endless and pointless task of unravelling language. Puzzles are not problems; they inspire not wonder but boredom. And people turn away and do something else.

From the perspective of philosophising, the ‘what is philosophy?’ question is deceptively subtle and dangerously misleading. The question invites people to study philosophy rather than to become philosophers themselves. The danger in introducing philosophy lies in presenting a list of the great philosophers and their key thoughts as though this in itself constitutes philosophy rather than an invitation to philosophize.

Let’s try a list of great philosophers, in chronological order.

1. Origins of Western Philosophical Thinking – Heraclitus, Empedocles, Parmenides, The Sophists, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Plotinus.
2. Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy – Sa’adya Gaon, Avicenna, Al Ghazali, Judah Halevi, Averroes, Moses Maimonides, Gersonides, Hasdai Crescas.
3. Medieval Christian Philosophy – Boethius, Augustine, Anselm, Abelard, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, Dante, John of Paris, Marsiglio of Padua, Duns Scotus, Meister Eckhart, Nicolas of Cusa.
4. The Renaissance – Ficino, Mirandolla, More, Erasmus, Machiavelli.
5. The Age of Reason – Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Spinoza, Pascal, Hobbes, Locke, Bayle.
6. The Enlightenment – Newton, Berkeley, Hume, Moses Mendelssohn, Thomas Reid, Vico, Rousseau, Kant.
7. The Nineteenth Century – Bentham, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Mill, Peirce, Strawson, Freud, Darwin, Dewey, James.
8. Anglo-American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century – Austin, Wittgenstein, Ryle, Popper, Quine, Davidson, Searle, Ayer, Moore, Russell.
9. Continental Philosophy – Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Merleu-Ponty, Habermas, Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, Lukacs.

I have extensive notes on all of these, knowing fine well that I’ll never get through them all and, further, even if I did, I would have been studying the history of

philosophy rather than advancing philosophy as such. Going through this list – which is far from exhaustive – one becomes very sympathetic to Wittgenstein's view that to do philosophy we should avoid reading the philosophers and their books and instead philosophise about real problems.

The list of great philosophers is endless. But try reducing this list to manageable proportions for teaching purposes - Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Leibniz, Hobbes and Locke, Hume and Berkeley, Rousseau and Kant, Hegel and Marx, Russell, Quine, Ayer, Wittgenstein, Serle, Derrida. Derrida? Exactly. Is he a philosopher? Which brings us back to the question 'what is philosophy?'

The question is controversial; it depends on your sense of wonder, being, life and its possibilities. Which brings us back to the question of why philosophy matters and what its relation is to real world problems of social life lying outside of philosophy as a discipline.

If a list of great philosophers doesn't take us far, maybe a list of key schools would be better.

1. Early Western Philosophy – the Sophists, the Stoics, the Cynics, the Epicureans, Middle Platonists, Neoplatonism.
2. Medieval Philosophy – later Platonists, Scotists, Scholastics, Realism and Nominalism, Thomism.
3. The Renaissance – Aristotelianism, Platonism, Humanism.
4. The Age of Reason – Rationalism, Empiricism, the Cambridge Platonists,
5. The Enlightenment – Philosophes, Empiricism
6. Nineteenth Century – Utilitarianism, Idealism, Empiricism (again), Pragmatism, Materialism, Naturalism.
7. Anglo-American Philosophy – Analytical Philosophy, Logical Positivism, Symbolic Logic, Direct Reference Theorists, Critical Realism.
8. Continental Philosophy – Phenomenology, Existentialism, Hermeneutics, Post-structuralism.

Again, I have extensive research notes on all of these, for a book that is simply impossible to write. It's the same problem as above, only in a different form. Behind the schools, of course, are the great philosophers. And it gets us no further. This approach gives us knowledge of philosophy, but is not philosophy as such. It may be necessary for teaching philosophy courses and passing exams, but just as the map isn't the landscape, so the certificate isn't the subject.

The figure of Martin Heidegger amply illustrates these points. Philosophers belonging to the empirical and analytical tradition are immune to the charms of Heidegger's philosophy. Gilbert Ryle dismissed Heidegger's philosophy as a 'self-ruinous subjectivism or windy mysticism'; A. J. Ayer sneered that his philosophy is a systematic act of misunderstanding of the word 'to be'. Which is ironic in that Heidegger's point is that philosophers – especially analytical philosophers like Ayer – have spent so long analysing the word 'to be' that they have completely neglected 'being' and all that that entails. Arguing that 'language is the house of Being', Heidegger was concerned to go to the roots of words so as recover their original meaning. (Heidegger 1947 in Farrell Krell 1978:193). Empirical and analytical philosophers concentrate so much upon what can be meaningfully said that they are unable to get beyond language, methods and techniques in order to say anything meaningful at all. For Heidegger, such philosophers have simply given up their birthright and no longer dwell in the house of philosophy. Heidegger is concerned to discover precisely when and how human beings lost touch with Being. And here is where the problems begin. Praising the pre-Socratics, Heidegger makes the challenging criticism that Western philosophy has been on the wrong path since Plato. Which, if true, implies that there is little reason to read any philosopher after Socrates. Replacing God with Being and renouncing eternity in favour of authentic dwelling in the fourfold, Heidegger blames instrumental rationality and technology for the fallen nature of Being in the world. Is 'Being' more important than a linguistic understanding of the word 'to be'? It all depends on whether one regards Heidegger to be a mystic or a true philosopher. (see Peter Critchley *Martin Heidegger: Ontology and Ecology* 2004).

To address such questions is to philosophize. And the point is that such philosophising is quite different from working your way through a list of dead philosophers or a chronology.

A thematic approach is an improvement. Here is another list, then, a list of the principal themes of philosophy:

1. Human nature and culture – what is human nature?; are we rational animals?; animal reactions and human responses
2. Language, logic – on concepts; asking the right questions; the meaning of words; how can I lie to myself? forms of argument; the barber paradox; the beetle in the box; language and meaning; how the reference of terms is fixed; denotation and connotation.
3. Epistemology : The Theory of Knowledge – what can we know?; the brain in a vat; Plato's cave; innate knowledge; certainty; from sense certainty to consciousness; the veil of perception; what do we know of the external world?; demonstrative knowledge; experience and understanding; the critique of doubt; can machines think?; what is reality?
4. The Philosophy of Religion – the existence and nature of God; religion and experience; intuitive conviction; metaphysical arguments for God; moral arguments for God; death; the problem of evil; the meaning of life; faith and reason; freewill; design; the proofs of God's existence; Pascal's wager.
5. Metaphysics – the problem of substance and its qualities; change and causation; universals and particulars; freedom and determinism; being and reality; the object of our thinking; the limits of metaphysical speculation.
6. The Philosophy of Mind – mind and body; mind and brain identity; soul and body; the incorporeal mind; the ghost in the machine; the subjective dimension of consciousness.
7. Ethics – morality and the good life; why be moral?; utility; duty; virtue; the problem of value; why good is good; facts and ideals; moral judgement; free will; naturalistic ethics; acts of choice; free will and determinism; ways of living.
8. The Self and Freedom – the problem of egoism and altruism; the problem of self; the prisoner's dilemma; the self and consciousness; freedom to do what we want; freedom and responsibility.
9. Political Philosophy – authority and the state; is there such a thing as society; justice; utopia; humanism and reason; positive and negative freedom.

10. The Philosophy of Human Rights – what are my rights?; cultural relativism; world consensus; rights to a safe environment; peoples or governments.
11. The Philosophy of Social Explanation – prediction and prophecy in the social sciences; agency and structure; methodological individualism and methodological collectivism; reason and ritual.
12. The Philosophy of History – historical necessity; history and humanism; the ahistorical ideal; lived history; contingency; the absolute spirit.
13. War and Peace – the just war; cruelty; violence; oppression; human nature; the state as war and disorder.
14. Animal and Planetary Rights – do animals feel pain?; do animals have rights?; lifeboat earth.
15. The Philosophy of Education – individual versus citizen; emotion and discipline; religion in education; sex in education; patriotism in education; education as social control; education as initiation; equality and freedom; respect for persons; democracy and authority.
16. The Philosophy of Science – space and time; conjectures and refutations; truth and rationality; is it all relative?; does time go by?; why is there something rather than nothing?; why do things keep on keeping on?; what fills up space?; where does the time go?; paradigm shifts; mathematical science and the control of nature; experimental methods; the problem of induction; cause and effect; falsifiability; realism versus instrumentalism; the limits of scientific explanation.
17. Aesthetics – beauty and art; ideas of beauty; imagination and art; judgments of taste; artistic representation and reality; is art sacred?; art and the limitations of experience; the intentional fallacy.
18. Life and its Meaning – meaning through service to others; how to accept reality and avoid fear; contentment with the human lot; the human condition; human life as meaningless struggle; the death of God and the ascendancy of will; meaning and idealism in a meaningless and godless universe; involvement and detachment; belief as necessary to meaning; what's the point?; what's it all about?; seeing our lives as part of a process; does life have a goal?; what is the ultimate goal of life?

Sounds fantastic. These headings are drawn from notes I have for a book. But, even here, this would be a book *on* philosophy rather than a book *of* philosophy. Imagine reading such a book (let alone writing it). Even in its bookish form, philosophy opens up a world of astonishing vistas. Philosophy is said to begin in wonder; it seems that this wonderment continues rather than diminishes. *If* it is philosophy. It is easy to imagine a long and arduous trawl through lists of key philosophers and arguments, neither beginning in wonder nor ending there. Such bookish philosophy may be packed with thoughts of such sophisticated and vast abstraction that the cleverness of the work may not be doubted – only its point. Here, philosophers do help. William of Occam, for instance, who argued that one should never multiply entities without reason. Do more with less. There is no getting away from the fact that philosophy is difficult and that it requires the capacity for abstract thought and abstract concepts on an extremely refined, rare and complex level. That is the key to philosophising – separating essential from ephemeral abstraction, knowing which entities can be safely discarded. Philosophy presents abstract concepts, thoughts and arguments which are not only difficult to understand, but can seem irrelevant in their abstraction. A thorough grounding in philosophy develops the ability to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant. Those who reject *all* arguments and thoughts simply because they cannot see what they are relevant to in their abstraction are not philosophers, they have not nurtured the philosophical mind.

Which begs the question as to whether the lists of great philosophers and philosophical themes develop the philosophical mind. If it isn't art, what's it doing in an art gallery, Tracey Emin asserted in response to the question is it art. If it's in a philosophy book or on a philosophy course, it must be philosophy. It begs the question of how something is defined as art before being selected to be put in the art gallery. These are great philosophers and these are the key themes, so this must be the way of philosophy, the reasoning goes. The student will thus be motivated to make the effort to work through the lists – the words inspired through a sense of wonder is to state the matter far too strongly. But it isn't philosophy, merely its foundation. At some point, the real philosophers find the inspiration and come to focus on some particular question or issue. Others continue to see philosophy as a means for generating results. Many others give up in boredom. Students learn how to write philosophical essays and papers on all manner of subjects, work of such quality in

terms of the terms, methods and techniques used that it would shame many a great philosopher. Look at the strict protocol now applied to research and publication in the academic world, the imperative handed down by the bureaucrats of knowledge that thinkers must demonstrate a strong publication record or the potential to generate such a record. Imagine how many of the great philosophers could meet the strict criteria. How long did Spinoza work on the *Ethics*? Would he be given this time now? How well organised and structured is Aristotle's *Politics*? Would Aristotle's work be accepted as a research proposal, let alone be published? How does Rousseau meet strictly academic criteria?

Jurgen Habermas is a contemporary critical theorist whose work is something of a synthesis of Kant, Rousseau, Weber, Marx, Parsons, Searle and many others. Reading reviews of Habermas' work one comes across criticisms that he has misunderstood Weber on this point or that point, misunderstood Marx on this point or that, etc. Habermas may well be mistaken in his interpretations of the philosophers he draws upon in his work, but the point is that his work is his own, an original mistake, something other than the contributory elements. He is an expert on his own work, not the work of others.

And this is the point with respect to the list of great philosophers. A student can come, by following the tortuous argumentation in all its abstraction and can come, in time, to learn the language. He or she can learn the tricks and tie others up in knots. Or himself or herself, for who would know? It is possible to learn the language in this manner; but you cannot come to speak it as a native by this approach. It has the form but not the content. Which is why Wittgenstein's seemingly outrageous command to discard the books makes sense: 'I have learned the jargon as well as anybody. It is very clever and captivating. In fact, it is dangerously captivating; for the simple truth about the matter is that it is much ado about nothing —just a lot of nonsense.' Philosophy is not empty eloquence. Eloquence is an optional extra, it is not obligatory. As anyone who has ever read Kant can testify.

The way of philosophy is not reading books and writing books – it is a practice, an *ethos*, a way of being and living. This is to restore philosophy to its Socratic origins. Language lives only in context and usage; in the dictionary, words mean nothing. The same applies to philosophy. Reading and writing philosophy can become an

excuse not to live it. But this does not mean that philosophy as *ethos* is a religion that abandons philosophy's critical and reflective discipline concerning truth and meaning.

Wittgenstein's conclusion that we should discard the books is extreme. Whilst 'extremes magnify the truth' (Schopenhauer), they are not the same as the truth. Wittgenstein's conclusion applies specifically to the book list approach to philosophy, the encyclopaedic approach one can find in introductions and courses. And even in this respect, it is difficult to see how else the subject can be introduced. Further, those with a bent to philosophising will, at some point, find something which inspires them to philosophise in the works of the great philosophers. The problems of real life may be the spur which turns people to philosophy, but they will read the philosophers for answers. They just need not read them all. In a sense, in some subconscious way, in putting the question, would be students already know the answer – they go to philosophy to find it.

The case against book list philosophy is this, that the thinkers who count as great philosophers made the list *not* on account of their knowledge of philosophy as a whole but on account of their particular contribution to philosophy. Students of the book lists can come to know only the conclusions of the great philosophers whereas what is most important is the process by which they obtained those conclusions; there is a danger of mistaking the results of philosophising for philosophising as such. What is left out of this approach is the range of 'real world' problems (mathematical, scientific, moral, and political problems) which lie outside of philosophy and which inspired the philosophising of the great philosophers. And this neglect applies also to philosophising in the present. Instead of repeating what Plato said, a philosopher should do in his or her own time what Plato did – drawing on extra-philosophical problems and disciplines in order to philosophise. The great philosophers are great because they sought to resolve pressing and practical problems in the 'real world'. The work of the great philosophers is not 'nonsense' as Wittgenstein claims; the nonsense is the philosophy in abstraction from the envioning extra-philosophical context.

Philosophy turns the problems of concrete life into philosophical problems; the resolution of these problems is practical, returning these issues to their origins in social life. In other words, philosophy is firmly grounded in the non-philosophical problems of the practical world. To this extent, Wittgenstein's criticism of the 'nonsense' of philosophy as a learned language is apposite. Philosophy withers when detached from its extra-philosophical roots. The point is that it is precisely these roots that are absent in the philosophy of the books. Ultimately, philosophy isn't 'studied', it is 'lived' as a practice. It is the extra-philosophical problems of the real, practical world that inspire and fires philosophising.

The argument is that whilst *'pure'* philosophy certainly can and does exist, such a philosophy is always in danger of falling into an empty formalism and verbiage the more removed it is from real, urgent and practical problems. It is this context which gives philosophy its relevance. In other words, it is not the abstraction of philosophy as such that is off-putting to people but its irrelevance. So what if 'pure' philosophy can demonstrate a perfect language, method or technique. There is precious little point in a vehicle that doesn't actually go anywhere. It's like pole vaulting. One may have the best pole in the world, it matters little if one doesn't actually make an attempt to clear the bar. At some point, one has to let go of the pole. Some professional philosophers give the impression of constantly polishing their lenses but never actually looking at anything through them.

In a very definite sense, the greatest vice of the book list approach to philosophy is also its principal virtue – the fact that it makes a wealth of philosophical knowledge simple and comprehensible. It's philosophy; it's not supposed to be easy and simple. As Mary Midgley argues, 'wisdom, and therefore philosophy, comes into its own when things become dark and difficult rather than when they are clear and straightforward. That - it seems to me - is why it is so important.' (Mary Midgley)

It is easy for scientists to reduce problems and issues to empirical evidence and explanation and dismiss all else as so much noise. The world of fact is easy. Philosophy isn't knowledge; it's not even understanding. In his essay, 'The Decay of Lying', Oscar Wilde decries the 'monstrous worship of facts': 'There is something truly monstrous about scientific curiosity because it seems to extend to facts

something they do not deserve. Facts must be respected but never worshipped.' Philosophy isn't about facts. It is about constructing rational arguments, critical thought, questioning so that we can be sure what we know and what we mean. Philosophy incorporates the whole learning continuum from data and information, knowledge and understanding, criticism and analysis, all the way up to the summit of wisdom. Philosophy is the summit and all points leading to it.

This ascent cannot be plotted in any simple, discrete sense. As Einstein stated, if we knew where we were going, we wouldn't call it research. This is a problem with academic research. There might well be a legitimate purpose in formulating a research proposal, but tabling time and resources to the n^{th} degree seems to be the very antithesis of research. How does anyone engaged in any serious research in Einstein's sense know precisely how the proposal is going to unfold? How does any researcher know what follows in stage 6 without having completed stages 3, 4 and 5? It all depends on the findings. This isn't research, it's project management. 'If you want to be ordinary, go and do what ordinary people do – project management'. Well 'ordinary' people are capable of being extraordinary, on account of their innate rational humanity. The role of the philosopher is to goad human beings into using their rational faculties and as a result becoming philosophers themselves, realised human beings flourishing in the realised human society.

4 ARE PHILOSOPHERS UP IN THE CLOUDS?

Plato said that philosophy begins in wonder (Plato *Theaetetus*, 155d). Philosophy begins in wonder but, as anyone who philosophises can tell you, it doesn't end there. The more one pierces the veil of illusion, the more wonder the world reveals. This wonder is the true reality behind 'the real world', the world that Nobby Geezer lives in as opposed to the 'ivory tower' world of the philosophers. The problem is that that 'real world' of the senses is not as it appears to be. Bertrand Russell described common sense as 'the metaphysics of barbarians'. The world is an odd place, Russell opined, so the truth about it is likely to be odd. Certainly, from the perspective of common sense, the arguments of philosophers can seem very odd indeed – the philosophers too. But the charge that philosophers live in ivory towers and need to get into the real world really does beg the philosophical question – what is the real world?

The 'real world' is not the world revealed by common sense. Philosophy is difficult precisely because it runs against what people perceive to be true. This counter-intuitive quality gives philosophy its value and strength, but this is precisely what makes it difficult to understand. People of common sense would struggle to understand Newton's law, which states that all objects are in motion unless stopped by other objects. Common sense indicate that all objects are still unless positively moved. The 'real world' view is false, the counter-intuitive view is true. Common sense tells us that heavy objects fall at a greater velocity than light objects; Galileo shows that, where there is no air resistance heavy objects and light objects fall at the same rate. Solid matter consists of empty space – true or false? Ask yourself what common sense tells you – then draw the opposite conclusion to answer truthfully. So the ivory tower philosopher can meet the challenge that philosophers should 'live in the real world' by saying, we already do, we're waiting for you to come and join us. The 'real world' of ordinary common sense shows anything but how the world really is, but is instead a congeries of illusion, fantasy and error. Dawkins refers to minds 'that are back in the stone age' (Dawkins 2006 ch 7). That's the common sense mind in 'the real world'. That world, with its technology and electronics, cars and computers, has been constituted by those applying counter-intuitive knowledge – ivory tower philosophers, computer geeks, boffins – the odd people who are capable of apprehending the odd truth of the odd world. The people that Nobby Geezer says should 'live in the real world'. Nobby Geezer lives in a world not of his own making, but the world created by scientists, philosophers, artists, poets etc who live in the ivory tower.

Which brings us to another charge levelled against philosophers – that they have their heads up in the clouds. The 'ivory tower' charge is of ancient vintage. In his play *The Clouds*, Greek comic playwright Aristophanes, referred to the philosopher's imaginary world as "Cloud-Cuckoo-Land". Aristophanes satirized Socrates in particular and philosophical thinking in general for being abstracted from 'the real world'. (Murray 1933). Aristophanes was simply wrong, both about Socrates in particular and about philosophy in general. As Cicero put it: 'Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and compel it to ask questions about life and morality.' Socrates did this by arguing that the most important question of all in philosophy is how we ought to live. "What is good?," "what is justice?" These are anything but abstract,

ivory tower questions; they are eminently practical questions in that they address the everyday affairs of human life. And Socrates took a stand on these issues, facing trial and suffering execution for his pains. The fact that the Athens that brought Socrates to trial and sentenced him to death was a democracy says something about the mistaken opinions of those who live in the cave of 'the real world'.

Philosophy is a way of redrawing the map of humanity with ideas, showing human beings the path to freedom beyond common sense through reason. To repeat, philosophers may be 'up in the clouds', but the ideas that they generate don't stay there, they come down to earth and change 'the real world' for the better.

Philosophy in an informal sense is as old as civilization itself. But as a mental discipline, philosophy began only when human beings started to try to understand the world around them by the use of their reason, without appealing to religion, or revelation, or authority. This seems to have begun among the early Greeks, in the 6th century BC.

The man considered to be the first philosopher was Thales. Thales was a natural philosopher, what we now call a scientist. The question which most concerned him was: "what is the world made of?" Thales himself drew the conclusion that everything was water in one form or another. He could see that at very low temperatures water becomes rock, at very high temperatures, it becomes air. Some ancient Greek natural philosophers thought that everything was fire, others that it was air. Whilst this may seem silly, the ancient Greeks were on the right lines. We now know that all material objects are reducible to energy, but the idea that it must ultimately all be made from a single element is a remarkable insight, extremely unobvious, and one we now know to be true.

Another early question was "what holds the world up?" Thales' pupil Anaximander realized that if, as Thales said, the earth was supported by the sea, the sea would have to be supported by something else - and so on, *ad infinitum*: you would find yourself in what is known as an infinite regress. Anaximander resolved this problem with the astounding idea that the earth is not supported by anything at all. It is just a solid object hanging in space, kept in position by its equidistance from everything else.

Anaximander's pupil, Anaximenes, went further to argue that the earth was flat and must be held up by something. He came to believe that it floated on air in the sort of way the lid of a boiling saucepan sometimes floats on the steam.

Original philosophy, then, was natural science. It was Socrates who changed the direction of philosophy from the physical world to the moral world. Far from being 'up in the clouds', Socrates brought philosophy down from the heavens to earth by relocating philosophical speculation from the nature of the physical world to questions of concern in the human world. Socrates did this by arguing that, beyond the question of what the physical world is made of, the most important question of all is how we ought to live. Socrates' basic question was: "what is justice?" The essence of philosophy has to do with the profound problems involved in understanding the world and our place in it.

Proceeding from these Socratic origins, this book defends philosophical thinking in two respects:

1) Philosophy, in its Socratic form, is not so much a rationalist outlook abstracted from life as a moral and ontological 'ought-to-be' challenging and subverting the 'is' of everyday reality. This means going beyond 'the real world' defined by common sense, beyond the flat earth of stationary, solid objects.

Beginning with Socrates' pupil Plato, philosophers have continually redrawn the map of humanity with ideas; they have held that the secret of turning around the benighted occluded vision of human beings, chained in their cave facing away from the sun, lay in the most rarefied essence of thought.

2) Philosophy in its Socratic origins is not an academic discipline removed from everyday life but a practice and a way of life. This implies the possibility of incorporating philosophy in 'the real world', insofar as people can be induced to exchange 'common sense' for a right reasoning embedded in habit, custom and practice.

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci argued against the view of philosophy as the specific intellectual activity of specialists and professionals. Instead Gramsci asserts that 'all men are "philosophers"'. Women, too. Gramsci argued that 'It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and

difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are "philosophers".

Gramsci refers to language, common and good sense and popular religion as a kind of 'spontaneous' philosophy that most individuals engage in. Philosophy goes much further than this, but it must be drawn back into this everyday habitus rather than remain in pure abstraction. It is this assumption of a rational capacity on the part of each and all that the hope of making the world philosophical rests. It is in the assumption of a rational capacity on the part of each and all, as members of the species *homo sapiens*, that allows us to rework Plato's 'Philosopher-Ruler' as the democratic notion that philosophy should rule. In becoming philosophers, human beings make the world philosophical.

It was in this vein that Gramsci defined the fundamental question of politics:

'Is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is the objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary?'

Gramsci 1971:144

Such a notion recalls Aristotle's definition of the citizen as one who rules and is ruled in turn. Answering Gramsci's question runs through this book. It is the fundamental question not only of politics but of philosophy in its concern to have practical effect in the world of human affairs.

5 SOCRATES

Socrates famously never wrote a word. For him, philosophy was not merely about abstract reason and reasoning, but an everyday practice. Leszek Kolakowski writes something interesting in this respect.

‘My first great philosopher is of course Socrates. The two great pillars of European culture, Jesus and Socrates, never wrote a word; we know them only through secondary sources.’

‘Socrates .. was perhaps the greatest architect of European culture, and is regarded as such even by those who do not share his philosophical views... not so much because of some specific doctrine he expounded as because of his *way* of seeking the truth.’

Kolakowski 2008: pp 1-2

The greatest architects of European civilisation and culture never wrote a word; they practised philosophy and the good life rather than wrote about it. Pythagoras, too, lived philosophy rather than wrote about it. In the East one can refer in this respect to Lao Tse and Buddha. Live it and be it rather than hide behind words.

‘Only this I know, that I know nothing’. Socrates knew that he didn’t know, and this is what made him wise. He knew nothing and he wrote nothing. He pursued truth, and that is what made him wise. What we know of Socrates comes from Plato and others. For Socrates, philosophy was not merely about abstract reason and reasoning, it was something one did. To repeat, philosophy was a way of life, a practice. One sees here the original meaning of ethics as *ethos*. Socrates knew well that reason is far from the whole of life. Reason highlights our ignorance. But after that, a good deal rests on character and intuition. (Hughes 2010; Ferguson ed. 1970).

Socrates’ pupil Plato is the first western philosopher whose written works have survived. Following Socrates, Plato was wary of writing. He suspected that, in the way that the written word objectified philosophy, it could become an excuse not to live it. He thought that, in the way it tidied philosophy up, it could become a means of concealing a meaning that can only be experienced. So convinced was Plato of this risk that in the *Republic* he bans poets from his ideal city-state. It seems an extreme position to adopt, and has been condemned as such. There is more to Plato’s rationale than an incipient ‘totalitarianism’. Poets in the Greece of Plato’s time were authority figures. People remembered and recited the body of work

from Hesiod to Homer, and in Plato's time had begun to write it down. This poetic work had become the dogmatic canon of the day. Plato saw the danger that poets were appealing to and cultivating the dogmatic instincts of citizens by providing a ready-made source of knock-out proof-texts for the positions they opposed. Plato wanted people to think and reason for themselves and draw their own independent conclusions and hold their own views.

Socrates was no ivory tower professor, but took philosophy to the people by meeting them on the streets and in the market place. He is drawn to others because it is only with others that people gain the best understanding of themselves. So for Socrates, the key to wisdom is not just defining abstractions but self-understanding. In this, there is an appreciation that all human beings are philosophers, or are capable of becoming philosophers, in that all possess the capacity to reason. The first philosophers in the Socratic tradition did not expect their pupils necessarily to agree with them. Rather, they taught people to use their own reason, to think for themselves, develop ideas of their own.

Socrates turned to philosophy having become disillusioned with the overreaching science of his times. He is fascinated by the big questions of life. He understands the limits of being human. He holds that human beings can understand their predicament by becoming conscious of what they do and of what they don't know. 'Only this I know, that I know nothing' (Socrates)

Although there is a tendency to think of Socrates as a champion of rationalism, his philosophical creed shows an understanding of limits and uncertainty. Socrates knows the limits of reason, he knows that he does not know.

1. The human condition is one of uncertainty.
2. Reason is wisdom if it involves a deep appreciation of the limits of understanding.
3. Self-knowledge is best gained with others and seeking it is to care for the soul.
4. The 'ignorant wise', who lack self-knowledge, shall be unsettled.

Socrates is drawn to others because it is with others that he gains the best understanding of himself, and they of themselves. Socrates did not test himself on his own, perhaps by writing a book, but took philosophy onto the streets. He spoke with, listened to and reasoned with others. This is a discursive, dialogic form of philosophy that sees others as, or as capable of being, philosophers.

‘Socrates did not set up grandstands for his audience and did not sit upon a professorial chair; he had no fixed timetable for talking or walking with his friends. Rather he did philosophy sometimes by joking with them, or by drinking or by going to war or to the market with them’ (Plutarch)

The corollary of this is that the more that people communicate with and get to know each other, the better their self-knowledge, and the better their philosophy. So philosophy is not just about developing and exploring independent ideas in abstraction from ‘the real world’ but is principally about understanding how people are the way they are and how the world is at it is. For Socrates, the key to wisdom was self-understanding as well as defining abstractions, an approach that recognises that intuition is on a continuum with reason.

The first philosophers, then, did not expect their pupils necessarily to agree with them. Rather, they taught people to use their own reason, to think for themselves and to draw conclusions which are supported by well-reasoned arguments. Philosophers are not teachers who pass on a body of knowledge, but *provocateurs* who encourage pupils to argue, develop ideas of their own. For Kant, the role of the philosopher is to goad individuals into using their rational faculties: ‘Have the courage to use your own understanding!’ (Kant *What is Enlightenment?*). Socratic philosophy laid the foundations of this "rational thinking", launching a rate of growth in human knowledge and understanding that was without precedent.

6 KNOW THYSELF

Consider the inscription on the temple at Delphi – ‘know thyself’. ‘Know thyself’ in this context means ‘know you are not a god before you enter this temple’. Socrates turns this from a warning into a quest. ‘Know thyself’ becomes the imperative to

understand yourself. But if the human condition is one of uncertainty, then the question 'who am I?' is elusive and will never, finally, be settled. It is for this reason that the 'how' of knowing oneself often gives way to the 'how' of 'how should one live.'

Philosophy tends to be considered a rationalist outlook which is abstracted from life. The philosopher is someone who lives in an ivory tower free from the pressures and imperatives to which most are subjected in the real world. But this is a myth. Philosophers have been exiled and imprisoned and tortured and executed –people who draw attention to the extent to which the 'is' of the real world falls short of the 'ought to be' of philosophy are seldom popular. The ivory tower certainly has appeal, if it could ever be found. Against this vision of abstracted rationalism, Socrates defined philosophy as a way of life and as an everyday practice dealing with limits and uncertainties. Socrates knew well that reason is far from the whole of life. Reason does much of the ground work – particularly in highlighting our ignorance. After that, a good deal rests on character and intuition.

7 THE 'HOW' AND THE 'WHY' – SOCRATES AND MORALITY

To understand Socrates' achievement, we need to recall the historical context in which he philosophised. The natural philosophers who came before Socrates had built a record of substantial and remarkably prescient scientific achievement.

Parmenides realised that the moon reflects the light of the sun.

Democritus postulated the basic units of nature as atoms existing in a void.

Pythagoras had worked out that day and night were far better explained by the earth going round the sun, not vice versa.

Such discoveries led to a scientific optimism which generated an expansive sense of human possibilities through knowledge. The extreme claims made for science and technology in the modern world are frequently discussed in terms of *hubris*. It is not for no reason that *hubris* is a word of ancient Greek origin. Socrates turned to philosophy having become disillusioned with the claims made for the science of his own time. It is important to emphasise, however, that Socrates challenged not science as such but the overweening claims made for science. Socrates recalls how he turned to natural science in order to know the causes of everything, why something

comes to be, exists and perishes. However, as he moved to the aspects of life concerning human beings, meaning and morality, Socrates found scientific explanation to be not merely incomplete but, humanly speaking, irrelevant.

Socrates contemplated the limitations of scientific explanation whilst sat in prison awaiting death. If the body's chief aim is survival, then, according to the scientific world-view, Socrates' sinews and bones should have been miles away. The reason that Socrates was in prison had nothing to do with the physical processes of body or mind. Socrates was in prison for a reason that science cannot begin to explain. The 'cause' of his predicament was a moral one. As a physical being, Socrates could have escaped and lived but, as a moral being, he decided it was right to stay and die.

Socrates' great contribution to philosophy was to have separated moral principles from physical causes. Socrates was in prison for reasons science cannot begin to explain – moral principle. He was there by moral choice. This was something that science couldn't explain. And it is this morality and rationality that defines the human species, *homo sapiens*, human beings as creative agents in some way autonomous of nature and physical cause.

When it comes to matters of moral significance, science neither asks the right questions nor uses the right tools. The scientific worldview overreaches itself when it prioritises scientific conditions over moral causes, when a moral explanation is more appropriate. Socrates saw that if it is meaning that you want, then it is moral philosophy you must study. Socrates thus created a category of knowledge to which science has no access.

Socrates' position here sheds some light on the perennial war between science and religion. In taking a moral position, Socrates is not taking a position against science as science. Socrates' animus is directed against that science which recognises no limits and encroaches upon the realm of ethics and ends. This Socratic attempt to delimit the claims of science is of contemporary relevance given the pronounced tendency on the part of *some* scientists in the modern age to condemn religion as 'made up' and to assert atheism as the only rational position. Whoever claimed that

reason is the whole of human life and human nature? Who said that reason alone should rule? That reason alone is legitimate? This sounds like one part of the brain – the analytical – encroaching on the other part of the brain – the part which concerns feeling and intuition. Good fences make for good societies.

If religion encroaches on the terrain of science in making claims to knowledge – and it really is only fundamentalists who argue the literal truth of the Bible – then scientists encroach on the moral terrain when denying the notion of religious truth. Since science does not deal with ends and cannot deal with ends, how can such scientists be so assertive with respect to the validity or otherwise of religion? Only by arguing that a value can, indeed, be derived from a fact. I shall return to this issue later.

Bertrand Russell takes second place to no-one in his criticism of religion, but he well knew the limits of science with respect to morals.

‘Science, by itself, cannot supply us with an ethic. It can show us how to achieve a given end, and it may show us that some ends cannot be achieved. But among ends that can be achieved our choice must be decided by other than purely scientific considerations. If a man were to say, ‘I hate the human race, and I think it would be a good thing if it were exterminated,’ we could say, ‘Well, my dear sir, let us begin the process with you.’ But this is hardly argument, and no amount of science could prove such a man mistaken.

Russell 1950. Reprinted in Gardner (ed.), 1984: 406-7.

Life proceeds by much more than purely scientific considerations. This is the principle for which Socrates gave his life. He could have fled Athens and avoided execution, but he chose to stay and take his stand on a moral end. For Bertrand Russell, such an ethic cannot be decided intellectually by scientific reason. Russell concludes that ‘science cannot decide questions of value’ since, if such questions could be intellectually decided at all, they ‘lie outside the realm of truth and falsehood.’ ‘Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know.’ (Russell 1935: 243.

Listening to Richard Dawkins and A.C. Grayling peddling a crude eighteenth century Enlightenment materialism, one could conclude that the scientific mind is completely bemused by religion. One hesitates to draw this conclusion on account of the fact that many great scientists have been much more cautious, recognising the limits of reason as opposed to pushing reason into areas where it is inappropriate. This crude science-religion antithesis really is old hat. Pascal's wager is all about this clash between faith and reason. Pascal is clear that either one has a belief in God or one doesn't; it is a matter of faith rather than rational proof. Pascal's wager is *not* about proving the existence of God, as Christopher Hitchens chooses to think – it gives him the opportunity to score a cheap point against Pascal (what kind of God would be stupid enough to fall for such an obvious trick?, Hitchens smirks. Well, not Pascal's God, a God of faith, but Hitchens' God, a God of reason that calculates the odds.) – but about how the very reason of the rationalists makes it more rational to believe in God than not believe in God. As a mathematician of the very highest order, Pascal knew all about probability. In strictly rational terms, the odds would incline a person to believe in God rather than disbelieve.

But as Pascal well knew, the question of God is not a question of intellectual proof. Religion is about belief, it is an ethical code. But it is more than that. One can hear the rationalists asking whether morality can have an objective basis. This misses the point. Religion is a feeling and a practice, what the Greeks called an *ethos*, a way of seeing the world and acting in the world. To set up a clash between science and religion in terms of reason and proof is to invite any number of category mistakes. It is like criticising an apple for not being a very good pear. A reasoned attack is more likely to sustain religion as undermine it; ridicule and abuse are as likely to provoke a backlash. The attacks of the likes of Dawkins seem designed to provoke the very bigotry they seek to root out. And the worst part is that it is a wholly misguided debate. Religion is not a theory, it is a practice; it is a way of life that lives in the heart, not an intellectual claim to knowledge that is proven by the head. Conversely, atheism is not a practice but a principle. But can a rationalist, empirical view of life be enough to sustain a flourishing way of life? Is that enough to nourish the soul? The proper response? Probably the way of silence. Atheists who assert that God doesn't exist are continually confused by the claim that no decent theologian has ever claimed that God exists – God transcends existence. How, then, can God be named, known, imagined? The heart has its

reasons, and the head can never touch them. Wittgenstein's conclusion at the end of the *Tractatus* is apposite: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.' There is often nothing to be said.

Socrates was not sceptical about the existence of things, nor about the power of reason, nor crucially about the value of life. Quite the reverse. Socrates affirmed the value of reason and of life, not least in choosing to die on a point of principle. What Socrates was sceptical about is what human beings can know for sure. The individual can become conscious of his or her ignorance. But whilst using reason to understand the nature of his ignorance more fully, Socrates also knew that reason alone was not enough; it too has its limits, most notably when it comes to matters religious. So Socratic philosophy does not stop at the point at which reason can go no further. Rather, it is but part of a philosophical way of life. Socratic philosophy embodies an *ethos* as well as the principles of an intellectual exercise; it is a practice that can embrace the whole of life as well as an approach that can engage the mind. Plato presents Socrates to us in such a way as to nurture an *ethos* as well as provide an education. The dialogues are the most substantial evidence we have that Plato thought Socrates presented philosophy as a way of life.

Philosophy as the cultivation of a way of life seems so different to what is usually taken to be philosophy today, with the emphasis on the development of rational techniques, thought and intellectual know-how rather than on a practice that seeks to shape the person, heart and mind. Socrates' wisdom lies in knowing the limits of reason. It lies in knowing that science deals with means and has no legitimate business in dealing with ends and that ends matter above all. Socrates puts science in its legitimate place. It is not a view a million miles away from Russell's agnosticism.

I do not believe that science *per se* is an adequate source of happiness, nor do I think that my own scientific outlook has contributed very greatly to my own happiness... Science in itself appears to me neutral, that is to say, it increases men's power whether for good or for evil. An appreciation of the ends of life is something which must be superadded to science if it is to bring happiness, but only the kind of society to which science is apt to give rise. I am afraid you may be disappointed that I am not more of an apostle of science, but as I grow older, and

no doubt as a result of the decay of my tissues, I begin to see the good life more and more as a matter of balance and to dread all over-emphasis upon any one ingredient.

Russell 1931. In *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914-1944* (1968), Vol. 2, 200.

To repeat, good fences make for good societies. There are many elements to a well-rounded human life, of which science is one, as are art, music, literature, poetry, philosophy and religion.

The case against the atheists is just how can they know, and know with such certainty. Rather than pursue this question, the book will focus upon philosophy as a way of life that gives meaning to life, bringing the happiness to which Russell refers.

8 PHILOSOPHY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

If one asks a layman or a laywoman the question ‘what is philosophy’?, the greatest number of them will answer ‘the meaning of life’. The notion is question begging. What is meaning? What is life? The notion of ‘the meaning of life’ rather presumes that life does indeed have meaning. Many hard-nosed scientists would deny this. All there is, is survival for the sake of survival for the sake of survival.

Still, the ordinary understanding of what philosophy is points to the roots of the discipline in the enduring concerns of human beings. Everyday life is filled with things that keep us busy and preoccupied. But every so often, we pause and wonder what it is all about. Looking for the meaning of life involves questioning the fundamentals we normally take for granted.

This can happen with regard to any aspect of life. In politics, we frequently hear terms like "freedom", "equality", "justice". Some may even ask what these terms mean. Such questioning can be difficult. We may all believe in ‘freedom’, but what kind of freedom? Freedom as the right of the individual to do as s/he pleases may bring about consequences that inhibit the freedom of other individuals. To legislate for the common good of all involves a reciprocal or relational constraint that can be felt as an infringement on personal liberty. But this constraint may nevertheless enhance the freedom of these individuals taken

together. To Aristotle, doing as one wants is not liberty but licence. Individualist liberals like Popper and Barnes have themselves condemned Aristotle as a totalitarian thinker. Aristotelian philosophers have defended the great Stagirite from such charges. (I argue strongly in favour of a rational concept of freedom, the idea that freedom of each individual is coexistent with the freedom of all individuals see Peter Critchley *Marx and Rational Freedom* 2001; *Reason, Freedom and Modernity* vol 2 Philosophical Origins 2001; *The Rational Freedom of Plato and Aristotle* 2001).

When we start to argue like this, we are beginning to think philosophically. In this instance, we are engaging in what is known as political philosophy. Any field of human activity can be subject to fundamental questioning like this - which is another way of saying that there can be a philosophy of anything – education, religion, science, law, medicine, music, art. Wherever there is a field of activity that involves the questioning of fundamental concepts, principles, and methods, there is a philosophy of it. And it isn't a coincidence that the best practitioners in each field are interested in its philosophy.

If religion addresses the question of meaning at the level of faith and revelation, philosophy seeks to ground meaning in reasons and sound arguments. So what is philosophy? Reduced to basics, philosophy addresses two fundamental questions concerning reality and knowledge.

The main branches of modern philosophy are:

1. Metaphysics;
2. Epistemology;
3. Logic;
4. Ethics/Politics.

i) METAPHYSICS – REALITY AND ONTOLOGY

Reduced to basics, philosophy addresses two fundamental questions – what there is (metaphysics) and what we know and how we know it (epistemology).

Metaphysics inquires into reality and its nature, and includes *ontology*; it is concerned specifically with the nature of being. Metaphysics concerns the ultimate or the underlying reality. Big claims are made for metaphysics: ‘Apart from metaphysical presuppositions there can be no civilisation’ (Tomlin 1947:264). Such a view is out of favour in an age of ethical and cultural relativism. (Peter Critchley *Ethical and Cultural Relativism*). Metaphysics is the scourge of relativism. Metaphysicians will point to the state of the world and claim that its confusion at the level of ends is due entirely to relativism. For a metaphysician, there is an objective reality, and ultimate truth and therefore an absolute morality. Freedom, truth, justice, goodness can all be known and can all be apprehended because they have an objective basis.

This begs the question of what we know and how we know it.

ii) EPISTEMOLOGY – WHAT WE KNOW AND HOW WE KNOW IT

What we know and how we know it is a question of epistemology.

Epistemology investigates the nature of knowledge; what do we know, what can we know and how can we know it.

The word 'epistemology' is derived from two Greek words, *episteme*, meaning knowledge, and *logos*, meaning rational account.

Some issues in epistemology overlap with some issues in metaphysics. Thus, an examination of the way that the mind shapes the reality it cognizes leads into an examination of the limits of human knowledge.

These two fundamental questions concerning reality and the knowledge of this reality are logically prior to the questions raised in a whole number of subsidiary branches of philosophy - moral and political philosophy, philosophy of science, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, education, law and so on.

How can we know? Rene Descartes emphasised ‘clear and distinct ideas’. Descartes argued that it is necessary to ‘withdraw the mind from the senses’ in order

to perceive the necessary truths of metaphysics. This real world is not a world revealed to the senses. Descartes exercised a sceptical doubt in order to attain distance from the ordinary conception of nature, making it possible to grasp a new conception. The only thing that Descartes could be certain of is that, at this instant, he was thinking. *Cogito ergo sum*. 'I am thinking, therefore I am'. From this certain basis, Descartes proceeded to build up knowledge through 'clear and distinct ideas'. Descartes' sceptical exercises entail purging the cognitive faculties so that intellectual illumination is possible through the use of the 'light of nature'. This involves training the will so as to affirm only those metaphysical propositions that the intellect perceives with clarity and distinctiveness (Hatfield 2003:xiv xv).

The fact that common sense gives us error and illusion begs the question as to the value of democracy. Common sense is the world of opinion, *doxa*, as distinct from the world of intellectual illumination, the world of knowledge, *nous*. In an unphilosophical world, the numbers are on the side of a democracy of common sense. It was a democracy that put Socrates to death. A few decades later, Aristotle fled, claiming that he wasn't going to let Athens sin twice against philosophy.

Some issues in epistemology overlap with some issues in metaphysics. Thus, an examination of the way that the mind shapes the reality it cognizes leads into an examination of the limits of human knowledge (Immanuel Kant and the *Critique of Pure Reason*). This will be taken up later when the discussion moves to Kant.

iii) LOGIC – MEANING

Logic establishes the principles of valid reasoning, paying close attention to language and concepts, to what can we meaningfully say. This refers to the world of words and ideas, the use of language, how to handle concepts in order to ask the right questions.

We need to be clear that the philosophical question "What is freedom?" is not seeking the definition of the word. You can find definitions in a dictionary. Just as philosophising is something different to an encyclopaedia of great philosophers, so philosophical terms are much more than dictionary definitions. Philosophy seeks a

deeper understanding of a concept, and examines how it actually functions in our thoughts and our lives, the different ways in which it might be used, possible dangers of its use, and of how it relates to other concepts.

The analytic tradition reduced the scope of philosophy so much that Wittgenstein claimed that: 'The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language.' Wittgenstein further argued that 'if a question can at all be put, it can for that reason be answered'. The problem is that the consequence of Wittgenstein's view means that the bulk of the crucial questions, from God to the good life, come to be dismissed as non-questions. Those questions are an essential part of the human condition. If philosophy no longer seeks to answer them, human beings will go elsewhere – poetry, art, literature, religion. Even football, pop music, television drama and film. It could be worse. When human beings invest politics and political leaders with transcendental meaning, the consequences are seldom good.

This represents a massive retreat from the big questions. Philosophy should stand firm on the 'meaning of life' question and recognise that the bulk of the crucial questions, from God to the good life, are beyond analytical meaning. This doesn't mean that philosophy cannot address those questions, only that analytical philosophy has nothing to say on them.

Take Socrates in his prison awaiting execution. Socrates believes he is there for moral reasons. Or has he merely misunderstood language? Or was he just misunderstood? Analytical philosophy would reduce Socrates principled stand to a misunderstanding of words.

Wittgenstein's view that all philosophical problems are a matter of language is too narrow since nearly all of the questions of most interest to speculative minds are such as science cannot answer and are beyond analytical meaning. Analytic philosophy is important in clarifying what we can say with meaning. But this elucidation of concepts is merely the surface of philosophy. It establishes what can be said with meaning, ensuring that, however difficult and unreadable, philosophers are not actually talking rubbish. The greatest philosophers proceed from this clarification to go much deeper and question the most fundamental aspects of our existence and our experience. Which brings us to human life, ethics and politics (they were one and the same thing to the ancient Greeks).

iv) ETHICS

Ethics is the study of moral values and principles. Why be good? What is justice? Virtue. What is the good life? Virtue. What are the virtues? How do you cultivate the virtues?

Ethics implies politics. What sort of political and social order embodies the virtues?

According to Leo Strauss, the goal of political philosophy is to acquire knowledge of the good life and of the good society.

All political action is .. guided by some thought of better and worse. But thought of better or worse implies thought of the good. The awareness .. which guides all our actions has the character of opinion ... it proves to be questionable. [This] .. directs us towards such a thought of the good as is no longer questionable—towards a thought which is no longer opinion but knowledge. All political action has then in itself a directedness towards knowledge of the good: of the good. life, or of the good society. For the good society is the complete political good.

Strauss 1988:10

Note the distinction that Strauss makes between ‘opinion’ and ‘knowledge’ and note how this distinction is related to the good life. Strauss is working within the ancient Greek tradition here, affirming the superiority of knowledge (*nous*) over opinion (*doxa*). The politics of the good is based on knowledge rather than opinion.

What sort of political and social order embodies knowledge, truth, the good? Plato’s *Republic* is the first and most famous attempt to answer this question. Plato was responding to the view of Thrasymachus that ‘justice is the interest of the strongest’. Why does it pay to be good? The point of *The Republic* is to show why ethics matters.

Morality is the royal road to happiness because the highest and best part of human nature is reason and morality is life guided by reason. Since happiness comes when we fulfil the best that is in us, then it is the good life alone that will achieve it for us.

Jacques 1971: 150

Before focusing at length on Plato, it is worth spending some time with Pythagoras. The scientists claim him as one of their own, as against philosophers and (worse) those of a religious disposition. This territorial claim on the part of scientists is untenable. Pythagoras is known for his theorem. Except that it wasn't his theorem, it originates in Mesopotamia. The Pythagoreans supplied the proof that it works in all instances, which is achievement enough. But Pythagoras is much, much more than his theorem. He is a philosopher-mathematician, the possessor of an inherently religious mind, who influenced Plato. Pythagoras is another of those architects of civilisation who left no written account of his views.

Pythagoras taught the means to attain freedom through rational conduct and the philosophic life. 'Pythagoras' metaphysics enables the Intellect to approach and know the ultimate TRUTH. His moral precepts ensure conformity with the perfect GOODNESS. To complete the trinity, he also adored the supreme BEAUTY which inspires the Muses as they do our Arts.' (Fideler ed. 1987 Source Book 13). Music, art and architecture all adhere to the cosmic principle of harmony. The quote 'the music of the spheres' is attributed to Pythagoras.

Disobedience to harmonic laws leads to ugliness, and commits a sin against the Muses; such disobedience is a denial of the divinely beautiful order of the cosmos. Obedience to harmonic laws leads to beauty and presupposes a state of soul open to Intelligible Beauty; music and architecture open our souls in the same way. Obedience to harmonic laws is an affirmation of the divinely beautiful order of the cosmos.

Such views seem to be a world away from the famous theorem. But it is worth looking more closely at this divinely beautiful cosmic order appraised by Pythagoras.

The meaning of the phrase ‘beauty is in the eyes of the beholder’ seems clear – beauty is a subjective state, a matter of individual taste and preference. This most certainly is a paraphrase which not only alters but actually inverts the meaning of the original phrase. The origin of the phrase is almost certainly Plato’s *Symposium*.

‘The contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold.’

‘But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.

Plato *Symposium*

The idea of a ‘true’ ‘divine’ beauty which is beheld with ‘the eye of the mind’ is a very different notion to that of beauty being in the eye of the beholder. Beholding beauty with the ‘eye of the mind’ – the intellect rather than the senses – brings forth ‘not images of beauty, but realities, for he has hold not of an image but of a reality’. Plato therefore argues for beauty as an objective reality which the ‘eye of the mind’ must apprehend as a beautiful reality rather than as image. The senses, the physical eye, see only the image and yields a subjective view which changes from person to person. One person will see Goya’s *Milkmaid of Bordeaux* and declare it colourful, another person will declare it dull.



The Milkmaid of Bordeaux, 1825–1827
Oil on canvas, 74 x 68 cm
Madrid, Museo del Prado

Objectively, in Plato's sense of true, divine beauty, Goya's painting is what it is, regardless of subjective taste and judgement, regardless of whether anyone sees it at all. Objectively, it cannot be both colourful and dull, except from the perspective of subjective opinion – which is not true knowledge.

The same thing applies to Michelangelo's *David*.



An opinion of a work of art expresses merely a subjective preference and is irrelevant to the object itself. Whether or not human beings even exist to appreciate the beauty of Michelangelo's *David*, the sculpture will remain what it is. Those who can appreciate the beauty that inheres in the object have attained true knowledge. As Francis M. Cornford wrote in *The Harmony of the Spheres*: “*Seek truth and beauty together; you will never find them apart.*” (Cornford 27). This quote neatly encapsulates the Pythagorean-Platonic position in one line.

The idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder is the very subjective opinion and relativism that Plato sought to demolish in favour of true knowledge. As with Descartes' intellectual illumination, the task before human beings is to apprehend the divine beauty by means of the intellect, ‘the eye of the mind’, and thus attain true knowledge and understanding in order to realise the good.

9 PHILOSOPHY IN RELATION TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

From the two fundamental questions concerning what exists and how we can know arise a whole number of subsidiary questions which form the various branches of philosophy - moral and political philosophy, philosophy of science, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, education, law and so on. Questions concerning reality and the knowledge of this reality are logically prior to the questions raised in these other branches.

An essential point to understand is that philosophy, science, religion and the arts are not mutually exclusive. They have plenty in common and there is a case for saying that they approach the same reality from different angles to give a more rounded and more fully human appreciation of the world and our place within it. A pivotal figure here may be Pythagoras, mathematician, philosopher, vegetarian leader of cults, the first to expound the view of the transmigration of souls and the source of the quote the ‘music of the spheres’. (Peter Critchley *Pythagoras and the Harmony in All Things*.)

Philosophy, science, religion and the arts all explore the same reality, addressing the mystery of the world's existence and our existence as human beings. It's just that they approach this same reality from different routes, each valid in their own way. Since they all use different methods and follow different paths to try to achieve a deeper understanding of existence, each may appeal to different temperaments. What they share in common is the goal of exploring human knowledge and experience, attempting to bring what is hidden to light in a publicly articulate form.

Philosophy, science, religion and the arts can enrich one another, and a fully rounded human being will find herself or himself becoming naturally interested in all three. The problems that arise will stem from the encroachment of one into the sphere of the others.

Philosophy is one of the most fascinating and valuable things that civilization has produced. And, like the others, its future is likely to be richer than its past, *if human beings just keep questioning and questing for the good life.*

10 SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY

In addition to the specific branches of philosophical study and activity - for example, art (*aesthetics*), law (*Jurisprudence*), politics, science, education, the mind, religion and language – there are many schools of philosophy. Among these are:

Idealists, for whom what is real does not exist independently of the human mind;

Sceptics, who question whether it is possible to truly know anything;

Empiricists, who claim that all knowledge is based on experience;

Rationalists, who base knowledge on thought and reason;

Utilitarians, who relate the notions of 'right' and 'wrong' to what makes people happy or unhappy in terms of a pleasure and pain calculus;

Existentialists, who begin their philosophical investigations with the concerns of human beings finding themselves in an apparently meaningless world and having to deal with such matters as personal freedom and responsibility.

In the first half of the 20th century, the English speaking world was dominated by 'analytic philosophy'. This was concerned with the careful analysis of language and the concepts it expresses. Key figures here are the likes of Russell and Wittgenstein. For many, this has led philosophy into a cul-de-sac, with many perennial philosophical questions coming to be dismissed as non-questions. The problem is, those questions keep being asked. They are essential to the human condition and firmly root philosophy in the ground of human being. It is time to recover those questions.

11 ABSTRACT QUESTIONS

"Philosophy" is a word which has been used in many ways. Philosophy is a discipline that mediates between religion and science.

In this book, I approach philosophy in a very wide sense. Philosophy, in this expansive conception, is a discipline that mediates between religion and science. Like religion, it consists of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has, so far, been unascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to the authority of tradition or of revelation.

From this perspective, Wittgenstein's view that all philosophical problems are a matter of language is much too narrow. Nearly all of the questions of most interest to speculative minds are such as science cannot answer and are beyond analytical meaning. Analytical philosophy points to the need for meaning and clarity, which is never a bad thing in itself. (I wish I could understand Derrida. He is claimed to be full of insights of genius. What I do understand, I have seen expressed better and much more clearly by George Orwell – and Orwell reads in about a hundredth of the time. I have a friend who frequently cites a range of French theorists in his arguments. I once asked him if he understood Jacques Lacan. 'You're not supposed to' he said. It was a relief in a way, since I have never understood Lacan and no longer feel the need to make the effort. I was, however, left wondering why people bother. That said, German philosophy has been similarly dismissed as an incomprehensible metaphysics. I have always found German philosophy to be the most profound and meaningful. Kant *is* worth the effort, the pain and the time).

Whilst many philosophers have, and in the past have had, religious beliefs, philosophical arguments are not supported with appeals to religion and revelation. A faith in God is not proof that God exists. A truth claim requires more. Philosophical argument stands or falls on its own credentials in the form of reasons. A philosophical argument looks for rational assent, not faith or obedience. Like religion, philosophy considers the fundamental questions of life and death, of purpose, of meaning and meaninglessness, of right and wrong. But philosophy addresses these questions by rational argument and demonstration rather than by revelation and dogma.

And whilst many philosophers are and have been scientists or influenced by science, they go into the area of ends where scientists tread at their peril. Science can supply no certain knowledge here and does well to proceed with caution. That said, I believe that there are grounds for challenging the philosophical convention that one cannot derive an ought-to-be from an is, and that these grounds stem from the advances currently being made in the fields of neuroscience, evolutionary biology and psychology. The 'is' revealed by these fields definitely point in the direction of what a flourishing nature 'ought-to-be' – as Aristotle has said all along. The convention that an 'ought-to-be' cannot be derived from an 'is' begs the question as to from where it can be derived.

Between the *definite* knowledge of science and the *dogma* of religion there is a No Man's Land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No Man's Land is philosophy. The philosopher does his or her best work in this terrain, mediating between belief and knowledge, bringing some kind of sense and meaning out of different and often competing claims.

As the quest for rational understanding of the most fundamental questions, philosophy raises important questions about enquiry, knowledge and understanding. How are we to go about finding answers to all these questions of ours?

Is there any meaning to life? Does the universe reveal intelligence, unity or purpose? What really exists? What does 'exist' mean? Is mind subject to matter, or is it

possessed of independent powers? What is 'mind', and how does it relate to 'matter'? What do we know? How do we know it? Do we know anything at all, or is everything we think we know just hypothesis? Do human beings have free will, or is everything we do determined by prior causes and circumstances? Are human beings anything more than tiny lumps of impure carbon and water? Are 'right and 'wrong' just matters of opinion? Why be good? What is the good life and how do we achieve it? If there is evolution, is it evolution towards some goal?

Are we merely naked apes, clinging on to an unimportant and barren rock in the middle of nowhere going nowhere, investing a meaningless existence with all manner of transcendental values in order to avoid going mad? I was inclined to this view the night that Arsenal beat Liverpool 2-0 to win the football league title in 1989. Some scientists hold such a view, happy with their own illusion that there is a grandeur in it all.

The sceptic and the cynic would ask why waste time on such insoluble problems? But the idea that time can be wasted in philosophical pursuits comes with the logical corollary that time can be meaningfully utilised. Which begs the question as to what constitutes a meaningful use of one's time and what isn't. The sneer that philosophy is a waste of time begs the question as to how the cynic knows. The cynic is making a truth claim that requires a sound epistemological basis, the very thing the cynic denies. Further, if it is all a waste of time, why does it matter? The cynic chirps away as though it does matter. Of course, it could simply be that the cynic lacks the ability or the nerve to answer the question and so simply seeks to suppress others' attempts to answer it. An individual facing the despair of cosmic loneliness can avail himself or herself of any belief system. It doesn't convince. Either it matters or it doesn't. The cynic cannot declare philosophy a waste of time since it makes no difference. If life is so bleak and pointless, then time spent this way rather than that cannot be judged wasteful or profitable. 'Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think' is the latest hedonistic mantra helping people to cope as they drone their lives away. Some people enjoy philosophy. It is not a waste of time to them. But the point goes further than this. The people who are drawn to philosophy are doing much more than engaging in a hobby or a pastime, filling in the pointless hours before oblivion. The philosophers believe in some ultimate, eternal reality, Plato's true, divine beauty and Pythagoras' music of the spheres.

Seems plausible. Why else do something so ‘brain breakingly difficult’? Others simply lack the nous and the nerve to tackle the subject – its not the empty, pointless world that worries them so much as their empty, pointless lives. ‘Enjoy yourself.....’

So what is reality? What is this ‘real world’ which is the abode of Nobby Geezer, the taxi-driving scourge of ‘ivory tower’ philosophers?

Apprehended in its most basic form, reality consists of a framework of space and time inhabited by a large number of widely differing material objects, some of which are people, some like philosophers, many more not so. Philosophers ask questions like ‘What is time?’ and ‘What is space?’ Are time and space objective or subjective? The time we see and measure is clock time rather than real time. The time we experience is subjective. When we are enjoying ourselves, time flies. An hour can seem like ten minutes. Clock time shows an hour, but we experience only ten minutes. When we are not enjoying ourselves, time drags. Ten minutes seems like an hour. Clock time reveals ten minutes, but we experience an hour. But if time is subjective, what of Plato’s objective reality? Can something have real existence and yet be a material object? Is what exists in the real world, including human beings, a material object and nothing more? If so, what is the nature of that object and what kind of existence does it make possible?

In fine, whilst the cynic and the sceptic deny these fundamental questions, they do not go away so long as human beings remain human and aspire to a life that is somewhat more than existence. That will always be the decisive reply to the sceptic. Simply denying the point of these questions doesn’t stop human beings asking them. Denial and repression are never healthy. All that is good in ‘the real world’, the habitat of our common sensical barbarian, is the result of a Beethoven or a Newton or an Einstein or a Goethe thinking that life matters and being bothered to make a difference. What good did it do them if they died in the end? Imagine a Picasso eking a living painting picket fences. It did him more good giving expression to his genius. It does no good whatsoever thinking life is meaningless and living accordingly. Philosophers and the need for philosophy will never go away for this reason. Whether the sceptic and the cynic likes it or not, human beings ask questions and want answers as a definitive part of their

humanity. To do otherwise is to be less than human. It is to exist, but it is not to live. It is questions such as these that philosophy seeks to answer.

In asking questions like this, philosophers are not just trying to achieve a deeper understanding of concepts. They are striving towards a fundamental understanding of whatever it is that exists, including ourselves.

Putting these questions rationally, if not the answering of them, is the business of philosophy. These questions cannot be answered by testing and experiment in the laboratory.

12 REAL LIFE QUESTIONS

Anyone inclined to think that philosophy is removed from the realities of life, and that philosophers are ‘up in the clouds’, should consider the following questions: Is it ever right to go to war? Do human beings have rights? Do animals have rights, and if so, are they the same as or different from human rights? Can abortion or euthanasia ever, or never, be justified? Should we care about people dying of hunger and disease in other parts of the world? If charity begins at home, how far does it extend?

Anyone who thinks that philosophy is something remote from the real world and irrelevant in its abstraction simply isn't thinking enough. Examine any of the conflicts in the world today, any of the disagreements which are the stuff of politics, television shows, and phone-ins. In all of these clashes of opinions and viewpoints are questions concerning freedom, peace, equality, justice, democracy, rights and the meaning of the good life and happiness. Human beings plainly value truth and justice, however much relativists and postmodernists and value-free liberals attempt to demote them by putting them in inverted commas. Regardless of the quality of the debate, all this argument represents a form of philosophising. Some arguments are better constructed than others, more informed than others, better reasoned than others. But if the presentation and defence of arguments is what it means to be a philosopher, debate over meaning and truth and justice is an integral part of what it is to be a human being.

These are questions of immediate practical concern in the world we live in and they are philosophical questions. Philosophers seek to answer such questions by reasoned argument, respecting logical, rational and empirical controls. Of course, such questions could be addressed by prejudice, hatred, opinion, desire, stupidity, wishful thinking and so on, but it is unlikely that the results will be pleasant. In *The Ascent of Man*, the scientist Jacob Bronowski took head-on the charge that science, in reducing human beings to numbers, led directly to the Nazi concentration camps. Not so, he declared. What caused Nazism was arrogance, ignorance and dogma. On balance, it is better to adopt a philosophical approach and use reasoned argument in resolving the perennial questions of human life.

So what is the relation of philosophy to science?

13 PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Like science, philosophy is a truth seeking enquiry that seeks to find answers to questions by a process of investigation and argument, developing new theories about the world and the nature of our experience of it, giving a rational support for each claim. However, unlike science, the questions that philosophy asks cannot be answered by means of practical experiment. Philosophical investigation is mental rather than experimental. No experiment or observation will tell us why we should be good or what "rights" are. They are outside the methods of science but are nevertheless capable of rational enquiry. They are philosophical questions.

Philosophy, science and religion offer three distinct, but sometimes overlapping, approaches to the big questions of life? The easiest thing to do is to distinguish between knowledge and belief, fact and value and thus place philosophy, science and religion accordingly. But are things so simple? If value is not derived *in some way* from empirical fact, then what can it be derived from? Is it just 'made up'? If physical existence is all there is, and science claims that empirical evidence reveals a complete absence of meaning, then what becomes of value? But what if scientists do discern such a thing as moral truth in physical reality? Then there is no good reason to accept the distinction between fact and value, meaning that science is free to encroach upon

the moral terrain abandoned to religion, or that religion and philosophy are able to back their values with empirical evidence.

The fear is that as science reveals more and more about the physical composition of the universe, not only are they denuding life of meaning, they are also encroaching upon other disciplines. This, as we shall see, is an ancient issue. The scientists of Greek antiquity, natural philosophers like Thales, made remarkable advances in the study of the earth. It was Socrates who brought knowledge into the human realm and thereby placed the search for meaning at the heart of philosophy.

I shall later spend a great deal of time on Kant on this issue. Kant wrote at a time of great scientific advance. Kant was not against science. But he took both Newton *and* Rousseau as his inspiration. Kant feared that the attempt to ‘enlighten’ society through the extension of scientific thought into all areas could generate anarchic consequences. For Kant, there is more than the one form of reason and ‘enlightenment’ is composed of more than scientific knowledge. A theoretic reason which is detached from common moral reason could well become destructive of the moral health of society if it stands apart from, alone or above the other forms of reason. Kant’s achievement is to have found a way of unifying science, religion and philosophy in a moral project which culminates in the freedom of the human species as a whole.

To be clear, there is no doubting the achievements of science in revealing more and more about the nature of the universe. In comparison to physics, astronomy, biology etc, the discoveries and truths of the humanities and social sciences seem puny. There is little that is clear and an awful lot that is disputable in the humanities and social sciences. But – and anyone could anticipate a ‘but’ coming at this point – doesn’t this simply point to differences between the disciplines? And isn’t there something of a caricature at work here? As if science has been without and is without disputation! Climate science? Biotechnology? Darwinian evolution? All that is clear and indisputable are those simplest things closest to empirical fact.

The problem is that science, its confidence high as a result of some remarkable achievements, is tending to encroach into other areas and attempting to reduce other paths to knowledge and wisdom to the scientific method – or to dismiss them

altogether. Not content with achievements in their own discipline, some scientists express an urge to conquer or subvert the domains of other disciplines.

An exaggerated claim? Listen to any scientist and it soon becomes clear that they believe that the scientific method is the one and only path to truth. How crude this is is clear when one examines how real scientists like Einstein make their discoveries via imagination and inspiration, by an *artistic* approach that generates questions which are then resolved scientifically. (Brooks 2011).

But the idea that truth can be discovered by other than scientific means – meaning that all that there is is empirical fact concerning an all-encompassing physical reality – is anathema to many scientists. Richard Dawkins never lets us down when it comes to providing an obvious example. Dawkins contributes an essay to Ben Rogers's book, *Is Nothing Sacred?*. The book examines the question whether the scientific worldview undermines the sense of the sacred, whether expressed in religion or art or music or any human endeavour. Dawkins admits that some things do provoke feelings of awe in him. He denies that this makes these experiences sacred, putting them down to a poetic imagination rather than a religious experience. Dawkins readily accepts that this is a manifestation of human nature.

There is nothing particularly controversial in Dawkins' view thus far. The controversial claim comes in the last paragraph, where Dawkins writes: 'Poetic imagination is one of the manifestations of human nature. As scientists, and biological scientists, it's up to us to explain that, and I expect that one day we shall. And when we do explain it, it will in no way demean it. But nor should we confuse it with something supernatural.' (Dawkins in Rogers ed 2004 ch 11.

Dawkins is guilty more of a sin of omission than a sin of commission here. In his concern to undermine the *supernatural* foundations of religion, Dawkins gives the distinct impression that the scientific *explanation* of art, music etc is all that there is to art, music, poetry. Dawkins denies that such explanation demeans these distinctively human disciplines, and he is right in this. But one only needs to hear him and read him comparing religion to poetry – as when interviewing Rowan Williams - to become clear that he clearly thinks that science is the high road to truth and all the other ways are detours and cul-de-sacs, some more scenic than others. The scientific

method is the one and only way to truth and knowledge. If things were this simple, then Dawkins' anticipated total biological explanation of artistic endeavour should suffice to produce the perfect recipe making for a Beethoven, a Bach, a Van Gogh. Of course, it won't. The Steve McQueen/Ali MacGraw classic *The Getaway* from 1972 was remade in 1994 as a scene-by-scene copy starring Kim Basinger and Alec Baldwin. The film was lousy. It was an exact copy and had all the same elements, but was lame. It lacked Sam Peckinpah's kinetic direction. Of course, that direction also counts as a physical element, but it is that elusive creative genius that makes something more than the materials which comprise the whole.

The cake is not the recipe. It all depends on the mix, the distribution of the elements, the baking, the cooking. And that always involves something more than the physical components. One can give a physical explanation as to how Van Gogh could paint *Starry Night*, but science will never be able to explain why he painted it. It is that creative extra which is the important element in making for great art, music, literature etc and which is the force making for an indeterminate future, however much physical explanation can account for an already determinate past. This extra isn't necessarily supernatural. Like culture, ideas, beliefs, morals, it can be entirely natural. But it isn't amenable to empirical analysis. The most important 'facts' of all evade scientific analysis. And in terms of anticipating the nature and direction of future creation, physical explanation is useless at best and dangerous at worst. Scientific intervention might well destroy the creative processes of a Van Gogh, under the pretext of aiding him in his attempt to create better art.

There is nothing wrong at all with attempting scientific or biological explanation. The problem lies in the failure to acknowledge that any such truth could only be partial, could fall short of the whole truth. It is the failure to recognise that other spheres of human knowledge could generate insights into the nature of reality, whether in the poetry of a man like William Blake, the sculptures of a man like Michelangelo, the music of a man like Bach, the philosophy of a man like Rousseau, the novels of a man like Tolstoy, the paintings of a man like Rembrandt. Free from empirical constraints, artists can intuit the truth through innate genius long before the scientists come along to dot the i's and cross the t's after the fact. Against this glorious cast, Dawkins *believes*

that all human endeavours will be subsumed within the meta-narrative of Darwinian biology.

To put the point in this way is not to deny the legitimacy of science. It is to challenge the tendency of *some* scientists to deny the legitimacy of other disciplines in their own domains. I don't feel protective or possessive about the problems of philosophy. The problems of philosophy are problems of the wider world, and are therefore available to all the other disciplines and modes of thought, feeling, experience for them to make sense of. There's an important point here. Some philosophy gives the impression of just speaking to itself, words for the sake of words, exhibiting an eloquence that is superficially plausible but which is ultimately empty. In contrast, science can point to demonstrable effects and tangible benefits. Philosophy is of value to the extent that it grapples with the problems of the world. The best philosophy has always come down from the clouds, its ideas leaving the safety of home, striking roots elsewhere to grow and develop in the wider world. And the world changes in the process.

Much depends on how science is defined. If it is considered that the only basis for knowledge is empirical fact, then it immediately apparent that there are many areas of human life that just aren't scientific. That's a limitation of science thus conceived. The cognitive and emotional reach of human beings goes further than this concern with the empirical explanation of physical reality. Science has a tendency to force other disciplines to meet strictly scientific criteria, and this is invalid. D.H. Lawrence made no claim to scientific knowledge. His literary truths respect other criteria.

There is a philosophical convention that one cannot derive a value from a fact. Many interpret this to mean that science and religion are equally valid in their own domains. It is not clear how mere facts alone could resolve the moral question of right or wrong. I shall return to this philosophical convention later on. I believe that the convention that one cannot derive a value from a fact is a particular characteristic of Anglophone philosophy and is less prominent in other traditions. The rational tradition of Continental philosophy evinces a much closer connection between the 'is' and the 'ought-to-be'. Aristotle certainly thought that his biological studies came with moral and political implications. Later, Hegel and Marx, in different ways, viewed the 'is' as the 'ought-to-

be' in the process of becoming. Essentialism in philosophy does not separate fact and value in the clear sense of Anglophone philosophy.

A scientist who takes his or her stand on empirical fact makes a very sharp and clear distinction between questions that are answerable and questions that aren't. The philosopher Wittgenstein stated that if a question can at all be put, it can for that reason be answered. A question that cannot be answered, in these terms, is a non-question. With this rule, Wittgenstein consigned an awful lot of the deepest philosophical questions to the rubbish tip. The problem is, those questions did not go away and are still being asked. They clearly resonate with something essential to the nature of human being, something which science is incapable of even recognising, let alone responding to. It is remarkable how many scientists get misty eyed gazing up at the stars, muttering something vague about the advances of scientific knowledge revealing our 'our place in the universe', but saying nothing of any great import beyond that. Ancient man and woman gazed up at the stars and drew conclusions much more profound than that. If one believes that it's all accidental in the first place, then there is indeed nothing more to be said.

For scientists, the only answerable questions are the ones that are capable of being located on the empirical terrain, thus falling within the domain of empirical knowledge. And that is the realm of science. The only meaningful questions, then, are ones of science. That sounds fine and reasonable, until one asks how these questions get asked in the first place. From where do these questions come? Intuition, inspiration, imagination all play a role, and these qualities are all non-rational in a scientific sense. Even if the settling of these questions is a matter of empirical knowledge, the asking of them in the first place is not.

The scientific case on fact and value is this, whilst science cannot determine moral right and wrong, it does provide the basis for moral decisions. These decisions are sensible only to the extent that they are based on reason, which, in turn, is based on empirical evidence. Immanuel Kant would certainly agree that moral decision is based on reason. He would vehemently deny that this reason derives from or reduces to experience or empirical evidence. He sets out the reasons why in his meticulously argued critiques. I will deal with Kant's position here at length later on.

This is not to deny that the scientific case lacks merit. The strongest argument in the scientific case points to practical import. Can philosophy demonstrate tangible benefits in the way that science can? That's a loaded question, since science deals with the tangible, the empirical, and philosophy works in the terrain of culture, norms, values, ideas. You cannot see or touch or feel concepts of truth and good and value, but they are no less real for that. Ideas are real. Human beings live by good ideas and values and die as a result of bad ones. Ideas *are* tangible, just not in the simple empirical sense of science.

It remains true to argue that without some practical consequence, "reason" alone is impotent. Which philosopher ever argued in favour of 'reason alone'? Even those philosophers who placed reason at the pinnacle of the human condition, such as Plato, made room for all the other aspects of the human character, desire, impulse and so on. (Peter Critchley *Plato and Rational Freedom* 2004). The greatest philosophers have always been concerned with the practical implications of reason, turning sooner or later to politics and ethics as domains of practical knowledge and wisdom. The charge stands against those philosophers who are content to spin words out of words out of words, displaying an empty eloquence at best, a verbosity concealing paucity of thought at worst. But whoever this refers to – fill the blanks - it isn't Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hume, Kant or any of the greats.

This is where we come to the heart of the matter. Many scientists reduce knowledge to empirical fact and so dismiss legitimate philosophical questions – form, matter, substance, free will and determinism, cause and effect – as non-sense, unanswered over two millennia for the simple reason that they are unanswerable. Such scientists – Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Susan Blackmore – reason that as our knowledge of neurobiology and evolutionary biology and psychology expand, so morality will be reduced to well-defined empirical constructs.

It all depends upon how narrowly or widely one defines knowledge. History is a graveyard of scientific and political determinisms, all of which claimed an all-encompassing knowledge only to fall foul of the radical moral indeterminacy of the future. The idea that morality can be reduced to the constructs of empirical explanation

is the plainest nonsense. Nothing in those constructs will substitute for actual moral decision. An Albert Eichmann will never be able to cite his neurobiological composition in order to justify his decisions to send Jewish men, women and children to the gas chambers. If scientists are happy with this reduction of morality to a genetic and neural determinism, then so much the worse for science. Such a science could never suffice to build a civilisation, although it could destroy a few. An explanation of physical cause and effect is not the same thing at all as moral decision and justification. Morality belongs in the field of indeterminacy and places responsibility upon human beings as moral agents capable of creating their future.

I have sympathy with the scientists' impatience with the apparently interminable disputation and quibbling of philosophers. I have a book entitled *Virtue Ethics A Critical Reader* (Statman ed 1997). It is a collection of articles on virtue ethics. Chapter after chapter contains philosophers labouring the point that the issue is complex, emphasising how little can be said with any certainty, endlessly pointing out what cannot be said, endlessly trying to reduce virtue ethics to a tired old utilitarianism, endlessly avoiding a conclusion of any substance, ultimately saying nothing. I quickly drew the conclusion that these philosophers were, first and last, academics of the worst kind, bureaucrats of knowledge with a vested interest in hiding their vacuity in the thickets of complexity, saying nothing but spending a whole of words and wasting a whole lot of my time saying it. The best chapter by far came from Robert C Solomon (ch 12 Corporate Roles, Personal Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach To Business Ethics), a man from the world of business who wanted a clear ethical code and so got straight to the point. And he established clearly just what is entailed by virtue ethics and why such an ethics matter. The others seem to have been pitching for another conference, so that they could supply more papers, and continue to justify their positions.

There is a need for philosophy to draw conclusions and generate consequences, and this is what the best philosophers do. That said, it should be emphasised that the chief value of philosophy lies in raising and framing questions in the first place. However interminable and frustrating this may be to practical men of business, politics and science, this is an exceedingly important endeavour. The most important philosophical ideas, however, are those that leave the philosophical home and take root and grow in the wider world. Science can show that its greatest theories in the realm of physics,

cosmology and biology have done precisely this. The visible evidence is all around. I would strongly argue that this applies also to philosophy. Aristotle may not be a figure that scientists care to respect these days, given that he set science off on so many wrong paths. But Aristotle, writing four hundred years BC, got plenty right. Whole civilisations, indeed religions, were built on Aristotle. That is some practical effect. Whether a science that replaces value with meaningless empirical fact is capable of building a civilisation remains to be seen. Philosophical ideas may not be visible in their effects, but they have built civilisations all the same.

Philosophical debates as to why there is something rather than nothing go on forever because, ultimately, such questions are without resolution unless they enter the domain of empirical knowledge. That is science's trump card against philosophy (and religion), and it is a winning card, *so long as one remains on the terrain of empirical knowledge*. Philosophy's strongest card is the concern with wisdom, a domain that deals with the meaning and use of knowledge. Certainly, one can tire of seemingly endless debates concerning the meaning of 'nothing' and 'non-existence', what it is and how one can prove it. Some philosophers may find these to be interesting questions, but they are practically impotent. If the question is ever resolved, just what issue or problem of practical concern would it effect? Even if the question is answered, it changes nothing and so is pointless. I have little argument with the view that many of the traditional questions of metaphysics are now best approached by scientists working in the fields of evolutionary biology and psychology and neuroscience. My quibble is with the view that there is nothing left for philosophy to do in these areas. The temptation is to claim that all meaningful questions are the province of science and that all those questions that remain in other domains are meaningless. This temptation should be resisted.

Which is why we have to be careful of dismissing as impotent and irrelevant all those questions that keep getting asked but never seem to be answered. Ultimately, such a view reduces truth to what works at the level of practical consequence. I am not averse to a little worldchanging. In changing the world, we change ourselves, effectively making ourselves what we are. Marx distinguished himself here by insisting that philosophy have practical effect. The world becomes philosophical as the philosophy becomes worldly. Such was Marx's praxis orientated philosophy.

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

Thesis XI on Feuerbach

That Marx was not advocating the mere pragmatism of what works was missed. In *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, John Passmore writes on Marx's Theses on Feuerbach: 'This side of Marxism leads it into close relations with pragmatism.' (Passmore 1968: 46). Marx's praxis is *not* closely related to pragmatism, apart from the trivial sense that both put the emphasis upon practice. Marx's critical-revolutionary praxis was infused with and informed by philosophical values and truths. Marx, like philosophers from Plato to Kant before him, wanted philosophy to have a practical consequence for the good. Bhikhu Parekh writes well here:

For Marx the discovery of truth requires a correct method of investigation, and the latter generally leads to a well-structured and well-presented theory. As he says, the 'faulty architectonics' of a theory is 'not accidental, rather it is the result of... and . . . expresses the scientific deficiencies of the method of investigation itself. (Marx *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. II, p. 166 167). This seems to suggest that, for Marx, a true theory is, as it were, compelled by the very force of its 'deep insight' to develop an elegant conceptual structure. One wonders if, like Plato, Marx believed in the harmony between truth and beauty. If he did, his thought would seem to endorse the familiar rationalist belief in the harmony of truth, goodness (which Marx also calls freedom) and beauty.

Parekh 1982 209

I wholeheartedly concur with Parekh's view here. Marx is not out to destroy philosophy but to realise it, to make the world philosophical and the people in it philosophers. Marx is firmly located in the Pythagorean-Platonic world and its commitment to the true, the good and the beautiful.

The vicissitudes of marxism as a worldchanging politics should, however, caution us to be wary of claims to knowledge and wisdom in the fields of morality and politics. In light of

Stalin, there is a great deal of merit in seemingly interminable philosophical questioning. But the record of science in politics is none too clever either. In *The Political Gene*, Dennis Sewell (2009) sets out a wealth of evidence to show the deleterious, inhumane and frankly murderous consequences of science when it strays from its own domain into the fields of politics and morality. What is most remarkable is the extent to which contemporary claims with respect to genes and neurons mirror those made by scientists past with respect to their claims to knowledge of human nature. In meticulous detail, with a wealth of the empirical facts that so impress scientists, Sewell traces the whole smelly history of Darwinism in politics - eugenics, forced sterilisation, racism, class war by proxy, concentration camps, the lot. A misuse of Darwin's ideas comes the retort. This may be true. Just as Stalin misused Marx's ideas. That's the danger of politics and ethics, of knowledge as power, of reason as worldchanging practice. That is why politics and ethics are legitimate, important domains in their own right, independent of science. They are not and can never be the playthings of scientists. Sewell takes this charge head on, focusing upon the ease with which science is distorted when it enters the realm of the political and the practical. His book is about 'the political uses and abuses of Darwin's ideas in recent history, and their persistence in the present day.'

As far as possible, I have tried to maintain the focus of the narrative at the practical and political, rather than the theoretical, level. In dealing with eugenics, for instance, what interested me was not so much the phenomenon itself, considered in the abstract, but finding out how a tightly knit group of scientists (and most of the main actors in this story were scientists - biologists, zoologists, psychologists and doctors) went about trying to sell an esoteric idea to the general public; how they organized, mobilized, and influenced politicians; and how they succeeded in getting laws enacted to suit their ideological purposes.

By approaching the subject at the level of individual political actors, I have also tried to connect what might otherwise seem quite disparate and discrete episodes, but which are actually parts of a continuum. The common factors between, say, the sterilization of a teenager in Virginia in the 1920s, crimes against humanity perpetrated by Nazi physicians, and the funding of research into racial differences in IQ, are very far from obvious. Yet I hope they will become swiftly apparent when the same face can be identified at each scene.

Sewell 2009 ch 1

And nor is Sewell inclined to let the sainted Darwin off. The issue is not just about the distortion of Darwin's ideas. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is thoroughly infused with Darwinism. As one sided as Hitler's reading is, stripped of Darwin's qualifications, it still bears a relation to Darwin. As Sewell comments:

A second line of my enquiry has been to seek to establish how robust the links really were between what Charles Darwin actually wrote or said, and what others, claiming to sail under Darwin's flag, carried into the social and political domain. I have been surprised, sometimes even shocked, to discover that in some sensitive areas the connections are rather stronger than I had expected them to be. When I began writing this book I was aware that many people regarded scientific racialism and eugenics as wholly unwarranted extrapolations from Darwin's thought, and effectively nothing to do with Darwin. I had intended to take an impartial approach, holding that view in balance with its opposite. I have come to the conclusion, however, that it is a false view...

As false as denying that Bolshevism, Lenin and Stalin had no relation to the praxis philosophy of Karl Marx. Which isn't to make Marx responsible for Stalinism, any more than Darwin is responsible for Social Darwinism or Nazism. Marx's political and philosophical principles and values are not those of twentieth century Communism. Darwin was a man of intellectual honesty and integrity who would seek out and document the evidence as he could find it, embedding what remained speculative within careful qualifications or caveats. In practice, of course, the finer distinctions get ignored. That's politics. Sewell tells the sorry tale of what can happen to science when it becomes politics.

So there is a need to be sceptical of claims that the most important philosophical ideas are those that leave the clouds and map the world. Apart from anything else, before they take root and grow in 'the real world', they originate in the philosophical domain. It follows from this that there can be no way of maintaining a sharp distinction between non-empirical and empirical knowledge. My contention is that whilst the principal philosophical ideas are those that are raised in 'the real world', they are nevertheless

born in the non-empirical world of the clouds. Further, even when all the facts are in, important questions remain, particularly with respect to the meaning of those facts. Any first year history undergraduate will remember cutting their teeth on Otto von Rank's claim that 'the facts speak for themselves'. They don't. They never did. The historian speaks for them. Take the issue of climate change. Some argue that wind farms are a crucial form of renewable energy as we attempt to reduce carbon emissions and keep temperature increases down to 2C. And they find the evidence to support their claim. Others reject wind farms as utterly incapable of meeting our energy demands, and find the evidence to support their claim. We can refer here to what is called confirmation bias, beginning with a particular position and proceeding to gather the evidence that supports it. But my point goes further than this. Climate change and wind farms, same issue, same technology, yet diametrically opposed positions which cannot be resolved by the empirical evidence alone. This shows that, in the practical world of politics and morality, something more than empiricism is required. Facts and factual explanation are only part of a much bigger picture.

Yet many still take their stand on the facts as against a morality reduced to 'value judgements'. Facts do not speak for themselves. If this is the case in history, it is even more the case in morality. No fact can settle a question of moral right or wrong. But – and this is the crucial point – this does not mean that moral questions are non-questions incapable of resolution. What can be said is that moral questions can be better informed through the discovery of facts which shed further light on the points at issue.

To assert that if a question isn't amenable to scientific method, then it is not a question at all is not science but scientism, the attempt to reduce all domains of human thought and action to the one, narrow method. Rather than dismiss the non-questions of philosophy, it is more reasonable to accept that there are many issues in human life that are not scientifically compliant. The questions relating to these areas may never get resolved but often it is the asking of such questions, rather than their final answering, that is the important thing. This questioning is an ongoing, ineliminable process and constitutes an essential part of what human beings are and do. Beginning with the civilization of the ancient Greeks, philosophy emerged as a rigorous method of assisting human beings in their quest for the good life. Our

intellectual tools may have grown even more rigorous since. I will later show how Kant improved upon the ideas of Plato and the categories of Aristotle, enabling us to appropriate the insights of antiquity on the modern terrain. Kant's end remained that of the ancients, the highest good for human beings, the *summum bonum*. The intellectual and, indeed, moral awareness of the extent to which an existing reality departs from a non-existent, but potentially existent, future is an integral part of this quest for the good life. This quest is an ontological quest in that it seeks a morally desirable future that realises the ultimate end of human beings. Philosophy establishes the reasons justifying this quest, acting as a spur to human action to its end. Science seems to think that we – or science itself – is now approaching the limits of human knowledge, that is, knowledge that can be placed on an empirical basis. This calls a halt to the philosophical quest far short of its realisation. Unless we accept the contention of scientists that we are now at or near the limits of our cognitive capabilities and creativity, that in some way we have attained all the perfection of which we are capable already, then to dispense with philosophical questioning would be to renounce a large part of what it is to be a human being.

In the very least, philosophical questioning orients and even informs decision-making in a significant way, certainly in reflecting upon facts and establishing their meaning in the bigger picture. Philosophy, for all of its analytical skill, never loses sight of that bigger picture, fitting the jigsaw pieces together to form a greater whole. It may still be claimed that, ultimately, the only source of knowledge is fact, yielded via empirical exploration. But the observation is trite. It is like the saying 'charity begins at home'. Charity may well *begin* at home; it doesn't end there. Knowledge, and above and beyond that wisdom, may well begin with fact, but they do not end with fact. What those facts mean is a non-empirical question. And it is the most important question. It is not a case of denying fact, just of relating them in a bigger picture.

Human beings are far too complicated and human affairs far too intricate to be amenable to scientific reason alone. There are many issues calling for moral and political decision which are not scientifically biddable. Reason can achieve all that reason is capable of and no more. To attempt more by extending reason into non- and

arational domains is to provoke irrationalism by way of reaction. (I have written on this in Peter Critchley *Adorno and the Irrational Use of Reason.*)

In *A Brief History of Time* Stephen Hawking concludes that scientists have been too occupied developing theories that describe the *what* of the universe to ask the question *why*. (Hawking 1988). Philosophers, the people whose business it is to ask *why*, have not been able to keep up with the advances made by science. Science has become too technical and mathematical for the philosophers, or for anyone apart from a few specialists. Some of the greatest philosophers have been mathematicians – Plato, Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza, Pascal, Russell. But mathematics and philosophy are losing touch with each other in the present age. This is to the detriment of both.

Scientism falls for the temptation to turn "why" questions into "how" questions. This is a plain conceit, the attempt to redefine all questions as science questions. We know that 'know-how' is science's own ground. But if philosophy has to come down from the clouds and make contact with solid ground, so too must science play away from home. The fact that science cannot answer 'why' questions, indeed doesn't even regard such questions as meaningful, does not mean that only 'how' questions are legitimate. It merely shows that scientific knowledge can go so far but no further. That 'further' is the domain of art, literature and poetry, music, religion and indeed philosophy. Science has succeeded in many areas of turning philosophy's "why" questions into "how" questions. And what science seems unable to claim, it tends to dismiss as meaningless in any case. For many of the more hard-nosed scientists, "why" questions as such can have no meaning since they presume a "purpose" that science shows not to exist. Philosophy's age old concern with the 'meaning of life' is thus considered to be vacuous.

That may be how science sees it. But that's not how human beings see their lives and it never will be. If science has nothing to say on the meaning of life, then philosophy should stand its ground. Human beings are meaning seeking creatures. They will always ask 'why', long after the 'how' questions have been settled. And if science abandons these questions, then human beings will turn to philosophy.

It is certainly possible that what is now considered to be a non-empirical question could in time be answered by science on the basis of empirical evidence. This is not the issue. The real controversy lies in the imperialist temptation for science to encroach, without reason and without evidence, on all other terrains, on the assumption that since science has explained so much already, it will undoubtedly be able one day to explain everything. That is the impulse behind Richard Dawkins' words on the poetic imagination as one of the manifestations of human nature. 'As scientists, and biological scientists, it's up to us to explain that, and I expect that one day we shall.' (Dawkins in Rogers ed 2004). It is wise to be sceptical as to how far science can actually go in such explanation before abandoning those philosophical concerns which have hitherto been essential to the human quest for meaning and for the good to the scientists.

The distinction between 'how' and 'why' questions is a correlate of the distinction between fact and value. It certainly has a bearing on the conflict between religion and science. There is a tendency to agree to disagree and preserve science and religion in their separate domains. Religion deals with values and science deals with fact. This may keep an uneasy peace, but whether this demarcation can be maintained can be seriously questioned. It is not even clear that this distinction is beneficial to either religion or science. Religion evaluates the facts of the empirical world whilst science is less and less happy with being excluded from the moral ground.

I think the distinction cannot be maintained and that fact and value can never be so easily disentangled. Hume's distinction between the 'is' and the 'ought-to-be' can be challenged. I agree with Daniel Dennett:

If "ought" cannot be derived from "is," just what *can* it be derived from?... ethics must be *somehow* based on an appreciation of human nature—on a sense of what a human being is or might be, and on what a human being might want to have or want to be. *If that* is naturalism, then naturalism is no fallacy (Dennett, p. 468).

The only problem I have with Dennett's view is that it denies the entire essentialist tradition in philosophy which has always argued this case, and which drew out the practical, political implications in terms of what Aristotle called a *politikon bion*, a public life of flourishing human beings. Dennett's view reduces values to natural facts

and paves the way for scientism. Dennett is selling his philosophical birthright for a mess of scientific pottage, reducing the 'ought-to-be' to the 'is' instead of seeking to realise the 'ought-to-be' out of the 'is'. The former is the denial of morality as integral to the human ontology; the latter is the realisation of this morality.

Clearly, not all "why" questions can be turned into "how" questions without fundamentally altering their character. The most obvious example of all is the human practice upon which scientists, criticising the impotence of philosophy, place so much emphasis. Human action is motivated by meaning. Human beings act only for reasons, for purposes. The action must have meaning to be sustained. Human action requires more than adequate explanations, it must have purpose. And since this is the case there will never be a time when we can dispense with the "why" questions of philosophy.

I shall address, and strongly reject, the argument coming from the field of neuroscience that such thinking amounts to nothing more than illusion, mere plausible fictions and myths which human beings have to entertain to invest their meaningless existence with meaning. This is cynicism of the highest order and it seldom ends well in politics. There is always a danger of moral irresponsibility whenever claims that life is just an illusion are made. It is easy to see how the moral and social constraints upon human behaviour can be weakened, and individuals lose their moorings, the more that life is conceived as an illusion. If life is just an illusion, then relations to others, the character of individual actions and the consequences of these actions cease to matter as much as they do when we believe ourselves to be living in a real world of real people, possessing a responsibility for our thoughts and deeds and the way that they impact upon others. I shall deal at length with this in the section of neuro-determinism and reductionism. To anticipate, neuroscientists like Crick and Blackmore assert that human beings are merely their neural networks and nothing more. The freedom that human beings think they have is a mere illusion. So what remains of moral responsibility? Do the consequences of human action matter in a world of illusion? It is easy to see human beings drifting into a world of amoral, anarchic fantasy on the basis of this neurodeterminism, acting regardless of the harm to others, being indifferent to the pain and suffering one's actions cause to others. This is a moral wasteland.

Neuroscientists claim that the question of human action is a 'how' question to be answered at the level of physical explanation, in "how" brains receive and process information and 'how' they then produce action. But if we want to know why Socrates sacrificed his life for a moral principle, why, indeed, anyone makes a moral stand for a cause greater than their own physical well-being, then a purely neurological answer is plainly incomplete and therefore inadequate in itself. The whole truth is gained by being able to identify the "why" that is always at work in human action and interaction. Human meaning, values, principles and purposes are always at the root of the firings of neurons and the release of hormones. Scientists seem to take a perverse pleasure in pointing out that our assumptions about freedom and free will are naïve and without foundation. That may be true, and calls for us to better delineate the nature of human flourishing within a greater natural organicism. (I would argue strongly that this is precisely Spinoza's achievement, see Peter Critchley *Spinoza and the Rule of Reason* 2007). But to argue that freedom is a convenient fiction, the product of biochemical and psychological processes, does nothing to change the human estimation of the centrality of freedom to morality, the sense that our humanity consists in moral choice, the ability to claim the future for ourselves as we see fit. We can better inform our choice, in the manner of Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei*, the intellectual love or appreciation of the God/Nature of which we are all a part. Which begs the question of whether scientific explanation subverts the human sense of the moral indeterminacy of the future, or empowers our moral determination of potential futures. Human beings have morality and have culture, they have created a moral technology that enables them to act at a distance from a blind, determinist naturalism. For this reason, it is clear that science can never put an end to the "why" questions that lie at the heart of human action.

This is not to deny that science could succeed in reducing human qualities to the firing of neurons and biochemical reactions. Of course that is possible. But isn't the physical explanation somewhat prosaic? Human beings are composed of neural networks and biochemical reactions, and these are capable of being scientifically examined and explained. But that's not all there is to being human. You can put a frog in a blender. The remains will have the same DNA as a frog, but it won't hop and it won't croak and it won't sit on a lily pad. Human culture is far more than neurons and biochemical reactions. Explanations of the physical processes at work

are the easy bit. But that may be as far as science can go. Here, science has to accept that if there are limits to its cognitive reach, these are even greater limits to its moral reach. Whether or not there is more to the universe than physical science can know is, obviously, a question that science cannot answer by empirical means. What is clear is that we should be extremely cautious of the claim that human behaviour could ever be wholly explained by physics or biology alone. Physicists, seeking to invest their discipline with a poetic grandeur, repeat the claim that we are made of stardust. Maybe so. But that dust has constituted itself as a worldmaking creative agency and organised itself so complexly through culture and technics that things such as ideas, beliefs, norms, principles, values have emerged whose sophistication goes far, far beyond explanations that are limited to genes and neurons, bosons and fermions. Biologists and physicists are free to attempt a complete explanation, but they are currently far short of success. It is in light of this that the claim that the only real questions are scientific 'how' questions, to be resolved by physical explanation, with 'why' questions dismissed as meaningless noise, can be safely rejected as just plain wrong. Stars and neurons are much easier to understand than human beings, politics and culture. This simplicity, with questions reduced to fact, emboldens scientists to think all questions are so easily answered. They've only just begun. How much further science can get can be doubted. Indeed, it seems that science is approaching the limits of empirical investigation as the key to knowledge. In which case scientists will have to move up a level to understanding. And after that comes wisdom. In this world beyond the certainties and simplicities of fact, human beings flourish on the basis of good ideas and values alone. And these are always the hardest things to discern, define and demonstrate.

One of the most painful circumstances of recent advances in science is that each advance makes us know less than we thought we did. This is the pathos of disenchantment at the heart of Max Weber's interpretation of modernity. Weber distinguishes *Wertrationalitat*, value orientated rationality pertaining to the achievement of substantive goals, from *Zweckrationalitat*, instrumental rationality, pertaining to the adoption of formal procedures. The modern world is split between these two forms of reason, with the increasing application of scientific rationality to all areas of human life and knowledge resulting in the 'disenchantment of the world'. This means that no single objective meaning can be ascribed to the nature

of things. Science can help us determine the best means to a given end, but, as science, cannot provide any guide as to the choice of these ends themselves (Weber, '*Science as a Vocation*' 1918 in *From Max Weber* 138/44, 147/55).

The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself.

Weber, "'Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy' 1904 in Shils ed *Methodology* 57

Scientific rationality can neither prove nor disprove the ultimate validity of any particular moral position. As a result of disenchantment, the world becomes a pluralist universe in which individuals alone had the ability to answer the questions 'What shall we do, and how shall we arrange our lives?' These are the hardy perennials of philosophy but, in Weberian terms, philosophy, like religion, has been disarmed on substantive questions. It is for individuals alone to decide 'Which of the warring gods should we serve?' (*Science as a Vocation* 152/3, in Bellamy 1992:184/5). And in the absence of an objective standard, these gods are at war. With no moral means of deciding between these warring gods, the world is reduced to a cacophonous polytheism of irreducible subjective opinion.

The "disenchantment of the world" through the expansion of instrumental rationality destroys the notion of objective morality and doesn't replace it with anything that could give meaning and unity to life. The world is stripped of ethical meaning and content, objectified as the material for purposive-rational pursuit of (self) interests. The gain in a value-neutral rational control is accompanied by a loss of meaning. The instrumental potential can be activated from any number of value perspectives. With the subjectivisation of values the unity of the world is shattered. In place of God as the unitary ground of morality there is an irreducible plurality of competing value orders: 'over these gods and their struggles it is fate, and certainly not any 'science' that holds sway'. (Weber 1:246-47 quoted by McCarthy Introduction to Habermas 1991:xix/xx).

This is the bitter irony of the fight between science and religion, the fires of which too many are all too eager to rekindle in the present age. Whether science can ever eliminate religion – which is the goal of the likes of Dawkins and Blakemore and others – can be doubted. It would be a first in human history, a society and a civilisation without a belief system giving meaning. But science can never enjoy the spoils of any victory it wins against religion. Science can never hold sway for the very reason it does not and can never supply the meaning human beings crave. It could, by revealing more and more about human nature, help us better shape ends. But this would always involve political and ethical considerations. The danger is that in eliminating belief systems that have organised the non-rational aspects of human life on the whole successfully, science will clear the terrain not for science itself but for renascent gods of all kinds, positively inviting the degeneration of the non-rational into the plain irrational. This was Weber's greatest fear, even expectation.

With the disappearance of the non-coercive, unifying power of collectively shared convictions, reason, restricted to the cognitive-instrumental dimension, is reduced to subjective self-assertion. 'Many old gods arise from their graves, disenchanted and in the form of impersonal forces; they strive to gain power over our lives and resume again their eternal struggle with one another' (*Science as a Vocation* in Gerth and Mills ed 147/8). Weber sees the fate of the age in the rise of a new polytheism taking the depersonified, objectified form of an irreconcilable antagonism among irreducible orders of value and life. As a result, the rationalised world has become meaningless (Habermas 1991:246).

The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"

Weber, "*Science as a Vocation*" in Gerth and Mills 1977:155

Instrumental reason, embodied in the institutions of the market and the capitalist organisation of production, so pervades human activities and relationships as to become the dominant form of reason. Instrumental rationality is so much the

overriding form of rationality in the modern world that many influential discussions identify it with rationality as such (see the editorial introduction to Elster ed. 1986). It is a form of reason not concerned with ends but with the efficient organisation of the means of attaining those ends. As a result, it is no longer possible to find in the world the larger significance of our individual actions, nor discern the values that lie behind such actions. Weber denies that the natural sciences can teach us anything about the meaning of the world (Weber, *Science as a Vocation* in Gerth and Mills 1977:142). Religion and morality are expelled from the domain of truth, and have to find some other status.

Hence the claim that the world is "disenchanted", lacking intrinsic meaning. J.L. Mackie has spelled out the "queerness" of the view that such a world might contain values. Mackie questions how objective values could relate to or co-exist with those characteristics revealed by science; by what means we could come to know of them; what possible relevance they could have to our existence (Mackie 1977:38/42). The modern world acknowledges that values and meanings exist only insofar as they are created by human beings.

The concern to repudiate instrumental rationality as a distorted relationship to nature and society takes the form here of a search for a rationality of ends and of a critique of the inversion between means and ends as inherent in an alienated social order.

The growing instrumentalisation of the world represents the enlargement of means and diminution of ends. So long as science cannot speak on ends, it follows that rationalisation increases human power at the expense of human meaning. It was in this vein that Einstein pointed out that the modern world has a perfection of means and a confusion of ends. Einstein also argued that science without conscience will doom us all. Given that, for reasons given by Russell above, science cannot determine ends, it is difficult to know from where this conscience will come *if science encroaches beyond its sphere to deny the legitimacy of ethics, politics and religion*. Such encroachment of means upon ends, of means enlarged to displace ends and become ends, is the pathos at the heart of the modern world.

14 HUMILITY AND HUBRIS

The argument presented so far is open to the charge that the criticism of science and the scientific world view is one sided. It is. It is addressed not to science as such but to the colonisation of all spheres of human life by science. If the hat fits. It often doesn't. Those contemporary physics looking for the God particle, working in chaos and string theory, tend not to be guilty of that overweening confidence and arrogance which justifies the description *hubris*. A scientist like Robert Winston, who has consistently sought to take the sting out of the scientific assaults on religion, is certainly not guilty of the charge, and his books are very sane and sober on the issue. (R Winston *Human Instinct*; Robert Winston *The Human Mind* 2003 Bantam Press; R Winston *The Story of God* 2005 Bantam).

Darwinian evolutionary biology is a different matter entirely. Having read, and greatly enjoyed, Richard Dawkins' *The Greatest Show on Earth*, I would have welcomed the great man's intervention in politics on the side of the ecologists as they continue to fight in order to protect the world's animal and plant species, habitats, biodiversity against the depredations of commerce. As a highly coordinated assault on climate science and ecology was unleashed in light of the hacking of the e-mails at the University of East Anglia, and the credibility and honesty of scientists was openly denigrated by such intellectual titans as Richard Madeley, Carol McGiffen, Alan Titchmarsh, Anne Widdecombe, Darren Gough, Richard Littlejohn and Neil Hamilton ('they make it all up', 'they're only in it for the money', 'the climate change gravy train'), the intervention of a scientist of the stature of Richard Dawkins would have been a big help. The above names are unimportant, their views too ridiculous to merit attention. But, of course, behind climate change denial is big money and politics. The assault upon the climate scientists was deliberate and well-organised. However, rather than take on the big boys of money and politics, Dawkins was and remains too busy challenging the easy targets of fundamentalist religion. Fundamentalist religion is not religion as such. A fundamentalist in anything is always a problem, and it is seldom beaten by ridicule and assault. Can there be a fundamentalist science in addition to a fundamentalist religion? Yes, certainly, if the claims of science are pressed beyond its own sphere into the realm of ends. If belief should not claim true knowledge – it shouldn't – then neither should science determine ends. Dawkins believes Creationism to be the biggest threat to science on the planet. I suggest that he pays more attention to

the politically motivated and orchestrated abuse that is directed towards those working in climate science.

The book *Is Nothing Sacred?* (edited by Ben Rogers) addresses the difficult question of whether the scientific worldview undermines the sense of the sacred in such things as nature, art, and human life as such. Never one to miss an opportunity to score points against religion, Dawkins concedes that certain experiences do provoke feelings of awe in him. For many, such non-rational or arational feelings are comparable to religious experiences. Instead, Dawkins explains these feelings in terms of the poetic imagination which, he claims, is a manifestation of human nature. Could be. There has been poetry, art and music for so long as there has been human society. And there has been religion, too, for precisely the same reason. Does Dawkins propose that science can dispose of poetry, art and music for the very same reason that it will one day render religion obsolete? He doesn't say so, but that follows from his reasoning. It could be that Dawkins was having an off day, but the view he gives indicates nothing less than extreme, ill-balanced, scientific hubris. 'As scientists, and biological scientists, it's up to us to explain [feelings of awe], and I expect that one day we shall.'

It is not just the determination to explain the feelings of awe that inspire the creation and the appreciation of works of art, literature and music that chill the blood, it is the confidence and the certainty that is contained in the phrase 'I expect that one day we shall', as if that is the important thing. The poetry of Blake and the voice of Maria Callas will be explained by neurons. So what? What changes as a result? Nothing. It makes no difference whatsoever to the character and quality of Bach's music or Vermeer's art or Caruso's singing. If neurons are all that scientists see and hear – or want to see and hear – in human culture, then so much the worse for science. It is impossible for science to distinguish between Nijinsky's ballet and a man having an epileptic fit in terms of neurons. Neuroscience can distinguish between healthy and unhealthy neural connections and pathways, and this can certainly aid the philosophical quest of human flourishing. And that means setting society and its relations on a flourishing foundation. This *strengthens* rather than replaces the ancient Aristotelian position on *politikon bion*.

Dawkins is confident that a biological explanation of the greatest cultural achievements of the human race will one day be possible. He does not doubt his expectation; he does not even question the point of such an explanation. Picture an English literature class, 'to be or not to be', *the* question of human life. Would you want William Shakespeare's explanation of that dilemma and the thoughts that it provokes, or Richard Dawkins' biological explanation as to why human beings respond to the question? What is most breathtaking is the lack of any attempt to balance the contribution that biology may – or may not – make to understanding alongside other disciplines. It could be an oversight, but Dawkins argues as though art, literature, music – and religion – have much less, if anything, to contribute to understanding. If neuroscience advances our knowledge of what it is to be – and it does – then our actual *being* also involves creation out of our biological composition. This is the realm of culture, it is what we make through our given biological capacities.

Pertinent here is a comment from Kenneth Clark in his book *Civilisation* (1969). Discussing the generally favourable first reactions to the machinery and mechanisation of the first industrial revolution, from politicians, industrialists, scientists and even the workers, Clark notes that: 'The only people who saw through industrialism in those early days were the poets. Blake, as everybody knows, thought that mills were the work of Satan. 'Oh Satan, my youngest born . . . thy work is Eternal Death with Mills and Ovens and Cauldrons.'

'It took a longish time - over twenty years - before ordinary men began to see what a monster had been created' (Clark 1969 ch 13). Marx wrote most eloquently on the monstrous nature industrial capital system and the way its inversion of subject and object reduced human beings to being merely appendages of machines.

all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate [entfremden] from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the

labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital.

Marx C1 1976:799/800

The poet Robert Burns, passing the Carron Iron Works in 1787, scratched these lines on a window-pane:

We cam na here to view your warks,
In hopes to be mair wise,
But only, lest we gang to Hell,
It may be nae surprise.

Hell? Take a look at the painting *Hell Scene* by Jacob Isaacsz van Swanenburg. It looks like a scene from the first industrial revolution. The painting dates from the 1620s.



Hell Scene Jacob Isaacsz van Swanenburg

Human beings being swallowed up by the industrial Moloch,

‘In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages.’ (Marx Capital 1 1976:549).

Compare this to the famous painting of the heat and the power of the industrial revolution, *Coalbrookdale by Night* from 1801.



Coalbrookdale by Night 1801 Philippe de Loutherbourg 2

There may well be a biological explanation to explain the insights into reality created by artists like Rembrandt and Cezanne. But compared to Van Gogh's *The Sower*, scientific explanation will be just be puny. If it doesn't detract from the art, neither does it add anything to it. Science is on the wrong side of the fact/value division to be able to say anything meaningful on the things that define humanity. There is grandeur in the music of a Beethoven, the art of a Titian, the poetry of a Blake, in the philosophy of a Spinoza, and in the life of Gandhi. What is there in the biological explanation of such things? There are *no* grounds for saying that a biological explanation of the work of Picasso, for instance, would enable the scientist to paint like Picasso. Scientists can impress themselves with such reductive explanations but the thing that defines human nature, culture and history is the broadening out of experience from the biological building blocks, the added value that human beings give to their

biological inheritance. It's called culture and it's something that scientists struggle with because they can't reduce it to the crudities and simplicities of scientific method and empirical fact. Not that that stops them from trying. It is the failure to recognise the insights into the sacred that come from all the other spheres of human knowledge, achievement and excellence that indicates the narrow vision of hubristic biology. Blake called it the 'single vision' and he was correct. Compared to Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*, it's pretty meagre and small stuff. Dawkins is prone to dismiss 'pseudoscience' whenever he comes across a view he disagrees with. He has sneered at those who make reference to the 'music of the spheres'. I am quite happy to take a stand on such a notion and will do so by referring to Gustav Mahler's magnificent Third Symphony. Mahler's Third Symphony is a paean to Nature. Mahler explains it in these terms:

'Just imagine a work of such magnitude that it actually mirrors the whole world – one is, so to speak, only an instrument upon which the universe plays... my symphony will be something whose like the world has never heard before! ... in it, the whole of Nature finds a voice'.

Mahler to Anna von Mildenburg

I have no doubt that Richard Dawkins thinks Mahler's Third Symphony could be subject to biological explanation – I would just wonder what the point of such an explanation would be when one could just listen to that work, which is something of real grandeur. Here one sees Richard Dawkins as a precocious little boy, the smartest in his class, no doubt, who has worked out that Father Christmas doesn't exist. 'Imagine a unicorn....' Yes, Richard, unicorns don't actually exist. God doesn't actually exist. Simple logic, isn't it, as Caligula would say. Except that no theologian ever argued for the existence of God. God transcends existence. But, of course, there is no empirical evidence of a spiritual world beyond physical reality. There wouldn't be, would there. That's the end of religion, then. Not necessarily. The idea of the unicorn exists, and is no less real than that. Human beings map their world with ideas and live by ideas. It's called culture. And it's real. It exists.

Scientist Victor Stenger gives the religious viewpoint short shrift in his *Has Science Found God?* (2003 Prometheus Books). Stenger is clear that science has not found God.

In the span of time since science saw its first dawn over 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece, theology has failed to empirically validate the existence of the transcendent. In fact, belief in the transcendent has been deeply undermined as scientific explanations based on a natural, material reality superseded the gods and spirits that people assumed animated the world.

Stenger 2003 Preface

My point is that *of course* science has not found God. If all that counts as evidence is the tangible, then evidence of the intangible will not and cannot be found. Here is Stenger again.

the empirical data and theories based on that data are now sufficient to make a scientific judgment: In high probability, a nonmaterial element of the universe exerting powerful control over events does not exist.

What? The empirical approach of science has failed to find the non-empirical basis of the universe? Well I never!! Who would have thought? And I'll wager that Stenger's empirical approach will not find the invisible pixies who, whilst enjoying themselves immensely in my garden, nevertheless leave no trace.

I'll stick with Mahler. Mahler prefaced the Third Symphony with the title *The Joyful Knowledge*. This was a reference to the philosophical tract of Nietzsche whose similarly optimistic outlook on the purpose of earthly existence it shares. The death of God in Nietzsche comes with an invitation to live and flourish as human beings. The first movement, 'Summer marches in', represents the awakening of Pan and the creation of Life from inanimate, primitive matter, a process which is mirrored in the music. Various aspects of Nature are revealed in the following four movements: 'What the flowers tell me'; 'what the animals tell me'; 'what the night tells me'; 'what the morning bells tell me'. The greatest show on earth, no doubt. But Mahler's

most original stroke comes in the finale, in his depiction of 'What love tells me': 'this collects together my feelings about all [love's] conditions; it does not progress without deeply painful episodes, but these are gradually resolved into a blissful confidence, or Joyful Knowledge'. Mahler closes with a sonorous, big-hearted Adagio movement which celebrates and reveres the glory of Nature. Nature could certainly do with some of this celebration and reverence today.

With reference to Mahler's conclusion with 'what love tells me' it is worth making the distinction between the two concepts of God in the Hebrew Bible.

Elohim is the God of creation whose signature we can read in the natural world as a world of fact. It is the God of physical nature and its process, not the personal God of revelation. *Elohim* must be supplemented by the personal God, the God of love, for fact and value, means and ends to be reunited. In addition to *Elohim*, the Bible reveals another face of God, *Hashem*, 'the name'. This is the face of God turned to us in love. This aspect of God is found in the relationships that each human being has to all other human beings. We see the face of God in the face of the human other that carries the trace of the divine Other.

Mahler's celebration and reverence of Nature invokes feelings of awe with respect to the planet which are of precisely the same kind to the feelings invoked by religious music. This provokes the question as to whether there is indeed a biological explanation which shows how and why art, music, poetry, religion produce similar feelings of awe, a sense of the holy, the numinous, the sacred. Some such possibility is what Dawkins no doubt entertains. But just what is the point? Even if it is all just an illusion, a performance, the art of great acting is to hide the mechanics. Just what is gained by revealing the mechanics? The art of magic is to create a world of illusion. Just what is the point of revealing the tricks that generate the illusion? Just what meaning does mere mechanics impart to the world?

Ultimately, the question of whether or not a scientific explanation of all things is possible is not the most important thing. An all-encompassing explanation of physical reality is necessarily incomplete. It may reveal all that there is to know about *Elohim*, the God of Creation, of physical reality. But it is silent on *Hashem*, the

personal God of love that binds all humanity together in moral meaning, enabling each to see the face of God in the other.

The hubristic bent of overweening science just seems so inhumane. Maybe there is no need to worry. A 'complete' explanation determined by the human sciences seems just too insular and narrow-minded to even matter. 'It would ask the question what religious music *is for*, as if its effect can be summed up by saying it binds people together, like a nationalistic hymn. Or it might adopt a psychological explanation, saying it evokes some altered state of consciousness, as if the altered state were all. However, such understandings alone, whilst illuminating to a degree, seem to necessitate certain 'no-go' areas of thought - those that resort to theology. Again, this is not to say that only believers can fully appreciate the perfection of Bach's B minor mass or Mozart's Requiem, for clearly believers do not gain some extra musical faculty upon turning to God. There is no divine hearing aid. Rather, it is the atheist mindset that is at fault: it appears forced to put a cap on the appreciation of such things. At the very least, a degree of agnosticism in relation to the value of religious yearning would seem to be necessary to be open to the music that speaks of divinity. (Vernon 2008 ch 4).

Mark Vernon is of the view that his atheism came to thwart his imagination; 'in practice, for fear of compromising its integrity, it led to a poverty of spirit. When the certainty of my atheism slipped, all sorts of thoughts became possible once again' (Vernon 2008 ch 4).

Richard Dawkins, of course, took umbrage with James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis back in the 1970's. Sensitive soul as he is, he heard the name of a Greek goddess and broke out in a cold sweat at the thought of all those New Age hippies dancing naked around Stonehenge. That is, Dawkins did precisely what he accuses some critics of his book *The Selfish Gene* of doing – he rushed to judgement, condemning what he had not even read, let alone understood. Gaia invests the planet with a conscious purpose, Dawkins accused. Only in the same way that Dawkins invests the gene with a conscious purpose came Lovelock's well-aimed rejoinder. That little spat was settled in terms of the science. The suspicion is that history will reveal James Lovelock to be much the greater and more significant scientist, not

simply with respect to the science, but most of all by placing the science within the bigger picture of the human relation to Nature. Lovelock's views are worth quoting at length concerning the notion of hubristic science.

What about God? I am a scientist and do not have faith, but neither am I the counterpart of those with faith, an atheist. I go along with E. O. Wilson who sees us as tribal carnivores who happened to have evolved to the point of forming civilizations. It takes a lot of hubris to imagine that we can ever reach the limits of our own intelligence; to think that we will ever be able to explain everything about the universe is absurd. For these reasons I am equally discomforted by religious faith and scientific atheism.

I am too committed to the scientific way of thinking to feel comfortable when enunciating the Creed or the Lord's Prayer in a Christian Church. The insistence of the definition "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth" seems to anaesthetize the sense of wonder, as if one were committed to a single line of thought by a cosmic legal contract. It seems wrong also to take it merely as a metaphor. But I respect the intuition of those who do believe, and I am moved by the ceremony, the music, and most of all by the glory of the words of the prayer book that to me are the nearest to perfect expression of our language. When atheistic science can inspire anything as moving as Bach's St Matthew passion or as seemly as Salisbury Cathedral I will respect it but not be part of it.

Lovelock 2009:194/5

The days when atheistic science can produce anything like the works of Bach and Michelangelo et al are far off. Culture nourishes the physical being. Richard Dawkins is too busy 'unweaving the rainbow' to worry about the culture that goes beyond the biology and makes us something more, something better, than our physical constitution.

Forget art and poetry, what stands most in need of explanation is the overweening scientific confidence of the likes of Richard Dawkins. His concern is to unweave and unravel much of the fabric of human culture. It is possible that Dawkins badly expressed himself in the example quoted, leaving out the qualifications and

acknowledgements that would have tempered the hubristic tone. And to be fair, Dawkins' books like *Unweaving the Rainbow* are brilliantly written. *The God Delusion*, however, is a massive let down, barely rising above the level of the journalistic efforts of Hitchens and Humphreys.

There is plenty in Richard Dawkins' actual work with which it is possible to agree – probably even the bulk of it. It is the slant on top of it that is ill-judged. A Pythagorean maxim is 'Do not poke the fire with a sword'. It means do not further inflame the quarrelsome. The danger is that Dawkins' approach provokes a similarly aggressive reaction from the more quarrelsome end of the religious fraternity. At a time when the world is getting smaller and people from different places are getting closer together, there is a need for mutual respect and recognition. We need to foster the unity of people in their difference, not their mutual antagonism and hatred.

Fertility expert Robert Winston has consistently tried to induce the atheistic scientists to moderate the tone of their attacks. Winston is both a biologist and a practising Jew, and is therefore well placed to shed some light on – and pour some calming water on - this fractious issue. In *The Story of God*, Winston puts the greater confidence of the biologists compared to the physicists down to the thought that they have it 'all wrapped up'. Contemporary physicists know better than to claim that. Winston makes it clear that biology is nowhere near having it all wrapped up. So why do they think that they have? The implication is that biology, dating its origin from Darwin, is a youthful science, a precocious, know-all teenager in terms of the history of science. Physics has been in the field much longer, and in a much more pivotal position. Physics has long since learned to the need to play the long game.

There is a difference, of course. Physics has long since fought and won its battle with religion. Kepler, Copernicus, Bruno, Galileo are a long time ago now. The human species made it to the moon. 'I can't see God up here' Yuri Gagarin is reported to have said. (I suspect it was a politician with an axe to grind rather than a man with a serious scientific purpose like Gagarin). Biologists are now claiming they can't see God down here either. Biologists can see themselves as having to fight and win the battle against religion that physics once fought and won. Hence Dawkins' constant assault upon creationism, the view that denies evolution and claims that the world was created by

God in seven days. That claim can be settled by reason and evidence. Whilst a belief cannot be destroyed by reason and evidence, it can be strengthened and reinforced by ridicule and attack. The danger is that atheistic science comes to take on the same dogmatic, bigoted character of the forces it opposes, giving the true believers a cause to rally around in the process. Fanning the fundamentalist flames serves neither science nor religion. And that is the point against the temptation to extend biological explanation into *all* spheres of life so that art, poetry, music and so on have nowhere to go and human beings find no grandeur. Explanation is not meaning.

Reference was made earlier to Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas' as crucial to intellectual illumination. The ascent into the light has played a central role in both religion and philosophy. We need this light more than ever. The last thing we need is hot air and inflamed passions. We have been here many times before. How many people really believe that holy water keeps away evil spirits? What scientific proof do we have to support such a belief? None. But, in a harsh environment in which life was precarious, the protective powers of holy water brought some sense of safety. There was no welfare state and no pensions in the sixteenth century. In the midst of life there really was death. And evil. People believed that evil existed and so they found proof of it. The world was corrupt and immoral and the devil's handiwork could be seen everywhere. But the people had their protections. Along come the Protestant reformers who knew better. Logic and reason told them to dispense with superstition. Away went the protections as so much pagan Popish superstition; the devil in the human psyche was less easily discarded. He was everywhere and, stripped of their protections, the people saw him everywhere. It is interesting that the great scientific revolution following the Renaissance should have been accompanied by religious wars, torture, genocide, bigotry and witch crazes. Logic and reason speak to one part of the human ontology, not the whole part. Where the *logos* seeks to go it alone, it risks unleashing a maelstrom of irrationalism that sweeps reason and enlightenment away.

Just follow the light, temper the flame and turn down the heat. Reason will win through if it is not hurried and not pushed into areas where it does not belong. Something that atheistic scientists might want to address at some point is the question why 'religious fundamentalists' find that creationism makes more moral sense and gives greater meaning to life than does scientific rationality. Could it be possible that

religious beliefs, even those who push them into the realm of scientific knowledge, offer a more sane and sober view of the world than a meaningless disenchanting rationality denuded of moral ends? Is there a moral nihilism at the heart of Darwinian science that the religious mind is alive to? Check the history of the first Darwinian revolution and how eugenics and euthanasia were normalised, until Hitler gave them both a bad name. In *Homo Sacer* – Sacred Man – G Agamben makes this comment:

There is no reason to doubt that the "humanitarian" considerations that led Hitler and Himmler to elaborate a euthanasia program immediately after their rise to power were in good faith, just as Binding and Hoche, from their own point of view, acted in good faith in proposing the concept of "life unworthy of being lived." Hitler ended it in August 1941 because of growing protest on the part of bishops and relatives.

In the middle of a war in which the Nazis gassed and murdered millions, Hitler closed down his euthanasia clinics – the continued religious criticism was giving him a bad name. Where was the criticism of the scientists with respect to eugenics and euthanasia? Be careful what you wish for. And be careful of having to choose between science and religion. The well-educated and well qualified in general, and scientists in particular, played a prominent role in executing the Nazi programme with ruthless efficiency. Doctors, scientists, academics, lawyers, judges, the Nazis were short of none of them. More than half of those who took who planned the 'final solution to the Jewish question' at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 carried the title 'doctor'. They either had doctorates or were medical practitioners. This Final Solution aimed at nothing less than the systematic and deliberate extermination of all Jews in Europe. That's the trouble with science when it gets practical and political. Lacking the capacity to deliver meaning in itself, science lacks a moral compass and is easy prey to power, focusing on the more efficient means to ends supplied externally by others. And that is to put a very diplomatic spin on the facts. The evidence is that scientists were more than willing to collaborate with the mad and murderous aims of Nazism and were proactive in giving Hitler's genocidal aims a rational scientific credibility. To repeat, long before the Final Solution, Hitler had launched his euthanasia programme for the elderly and infirm and disabled.

As the bombs and bullets fly, the philosophers back in No-Man's land would do well to put their tin hats on. Philosophy easily identifies ideological overconfidence here. With Socrates, philosophy began as a reaction against the overweening claims of science. Philosophy has been here before and has seen both science and religion in militant fundamentalist form and dogmatic guise many times.

In destroying the God of religion, there is a danger that science will put all too human, all too flawed human beings in its place. Human beings as gods.

It is said that science will dehumanize people and turn them into numbers. That is false: tragically false. Look for yourself. This is the concentration camp and crematorium at Auschwitz. This is where people were turned into numbers. Into this pond were flushed the ashes of four million people. And that was not done by gas. It was done by arrogance. It was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known; we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgment in science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible. In the end, the words were said by Oliver Cromwell: 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ: Think it possible you may be mistaken.' We have to cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power. We have to close the distance between the push-button order and the human act. We have to touch people.

Bronowski 2011 ch 11

Out of nothing so crooked can something entirely straight be made – Kant on the human species and the limits of reason.

It is almost impertinent to talk of the ascent of man in the presence of two men, Newton and Einstein, who stride like gods. Of the two, Newton is the Old Testament god; it is Einstein who is the New Testament figure. He was full of humanity, pity, a sense of enormous sympathy. His vision of nature herself was

that of a human being in the presence of something god-like, and that is what he always said about nature. He was fond of talking about God: 'God does not play at dice', 'God is not malicious'. Finally Niels Bohr one day said to him, 'Stop telling God what to do'. But that is not quite fair. Einstein was a man who could ask immensely simple questions. And what his life showed, and his work, is that when the answers are simple too, then you hear God thinking.

Bronowski 2011 ch 7

In announcing the death of God, Nietzsche asked: 'Must we ourselves not become gods?' We are now masters of the world, but Nietzsche suggests that the responsibility may be too great for us, as we stray unawares into infinite space. From a scientific point of view, the death of God is a triumph. Nietzsche implies that it could well be a tragedy. It depends upon the extent to which we live up to our creative powers and flourish as human beings.

The danger of human beings aspiring to become gods is something that Bronowski draws attention to. Gods are omnipotent, infallible. The problems with human knowledge come when power comes to be considered omnipotent and infallible. And this is the case against hubristic science (and hubristic anything). To exchange God for human beings as gods is to exalt fallibility and insulate it from criticism.

And we return here to Wittgenstein: 'We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life have not been put to rest.' Even if *all* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life will remain to be grappled with and resolved. Of course. Because these problems of life are not matters with which science is equipped to deal. They are matters of the human character, the human psyche and ontology. As Bertrand Russell argued, science cannot determine the ends of life. Worse, the extension of instrumental rationality extends science into domains of life where it does not belong, emptying the world of meaning. The greater the province of scientific rationality, the less meaning the world has. This was the pathos of modernity according to Max Weber.

This is the point that Nietzsche is making with respect to the death of God. For human beings to become gods through science would empty the world of meaning. This returns to Richard Dawkins' emphasis upon biological explanation over and above the insights and meaning generated by all other human domains. 'As scientists, and biological scientists, it's up to us to explain [feelings of awe], and I expect that one day we shall.' Which begs the question that, even if biological science finally succeeds in explaining everything, in what way would this deny the realms of morality, values and culture? Biology could inform these realms, but it enhances them rather than replaces them. There is the implication that once the mechanisms of morality, values and culture have been explained by biology, they have been explained away. Morality is nothing to do with virtue, being good, respect, recognition etc; it is *nothing but* some neural reaction, or some innate self-interested reciprocity hardwired by evolution into some part of the brain. Then why be moral, why be virtuous? It's all a ruse. Because it possesses an evolutionary pay-off, as though the relation between mother and child is no more than a biological imperative ensuring the survival of the genes. To reduce nature to mechanisms, imperatives and laws, is to deny human beings a history as creative, change making agents. If morality, virtue and culture can be explained by innate mechanism, then purpose, intellect and imagination must come to be extinguished. Existence comes to replace life. This is to reduce human beings back to an empirical level of unreflective, unconscious animal existence. Which implies that the artists, the poets, the musicians have a much greater understanding of human beings and human life than the biologists. Such a view is anthropologically and sociologically illiterate. But if biological explanation does not deny morality, virtue and culture, but instead informs and strengthens them – and this would be my reading – then this would be science *in the service of* the philosophical quest for the good life. A learned gentleman, economist John Maynard Keynes never made the mistake of thinking economics to be anything more than an intellectual means. We are custodians not of the good life, Keynes stated, but of the mechanics which human beings utilise in their quest for the good life.

The crisis of capitalism is not merely an economic crisis but a moral crisis, the collapse of a system erected on monetary foundations. At the core of this moral crisis is the worship of economic growth for its own sake, rather than considering economics as a means towards the end of the 'good life'. The same point applies to science. A civilisation cannot be built on the *logos* alone. There are psychic and ontological realities which must find expression at the moral level of human health and well-being.

In practice, as social beings relating to each other, human beings adopt some set of values, which are then superimposed on the world. Even scientists subscribe to some such set of values. When human beings do not do so, the effects are soon apparent to and felt by others. It is impossible to live without a moral code to which others subscribe, or at least recognise. Which begs the question as to where this morality comes from. The simple answer over the centuries has been from God. One could be less simple and refer to Plato's objective reality as the true, divine order. Or to Spinoza's God/Nature. In which case morality is a relation of something inside to something/someone outside. With respect to Nietzsche's point, the death of God gives human beings the responsibility to invent their own autonomous morality. Human beings can no longer merely inherit their morality. Emancipation from God (or God/Nature) involves human beings becoming as gods. The words of Bronowski referring to Nazism and the concentration camps bear repetition here: 'It was done by arrogance. It was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known; we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgment in science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible' (Bronowski 2011 ch 11).

For human beings to become as gods requires more than science. Bronowski refers to the consequences which follow when fallible human beings aspire to the infallible knowledge of gods. In a Spinozist sense, God is whole Nature, *Deus sive Natura*.

Human beings can only ever be a part of this self-subsistent whole, and can never know the whole. And, as Bronowski emphasises, the value of science is that it pursues what we can know whilst recognising our fallibility, whilst recognising what we do not know, cannot know, that we can err. As argued from the first, Socrates was the wisest of all because he knew that he did not know.

The problem is that within a modern society organised around instrumental rationality, morality has been supplanted by technique. The central goal of modern society is technological progress. The problem is that, even apart from the fallibility of science, knowledge is only part of human life, which ought to complement all other aspects rather than be exalted above them. In terms of knowledge, human beings know far more now than they did one hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, two thousand years ago. Does that make them morally superior, happier, freer? Or, to put the question from another angle, people two thousand years ago lacked the knowledge of people today. Does that mean that they were less capable of morality, freedom, and happiness than people today? The purpose of putting these questions is to make the point that ends are not determined by or conditional upon the means. This view that 'progress' is conditional upon the advance of means is the blight of the modern world.

In 1930, in the immediate aftermath of the Great Crash, the economist John Maynard Keynes speculated upon the 'economic possibilities for our grandchildren'. Keynes explicitly recognised that 'Modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit, often, though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers.' Such a system dispenses with ends and replaces them with material expansion and technological progress (itself a means to continued capital accumulation). What is most significant, however, is Keynes' argument that whilst capitalism is an immoral system, we must ourselves be immoral until we become rich enough in order to be moral.

Despite the economic depression, Keynes concluded that, within a couple of generations, it was perfectly possible that everybody would be rich. 'We shall then, he said, once more value ends above means and prefer the

good to the useful.' But beware!' Keynes warns, 'the time for all that is not yet. For at least another 100 years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone else that fair is foul and foul is fair : for foul is useful and fair is not'.

This is a diabolical statement worthy of Goethe. Modern society is founded upon this Faustian bargain. Human beings have sold their souls in exchange for a material expansion which, at some indeterminate point in the future, will generate sufficient wealth to allow those souls to be bought back. The problem is that capitalism is an endless system. The pursuit of means in order to accumulate further means is a nihilism – there is no end point. The souls that human beings have sold will wither and die. A society of means does not nourish the soul. Subordinated to a society of means, human beings have to deny that they have a soul; ultimately, they will come to have no soul. And the ultimate irony is that the promise of endless material progress can never deliver – the only ‘ethic’ it has is more means for the sake of means – an accumulation of quantity to fill up the vast chasm where the soul once was. This is the pathos of means becoming ends; human beings have become enslaved to a nihilistic materialist expansion that can accumulate quantity but cannot deliver on ends.

Keynes was a highly intelligent, well-read, cultured man with a serious background in philosophy. He knew well that the good life is much more than material expansion. Yet he saw no alternative but to keep ‘pretending’ that the expansion of the means is the same thing as an end. What is remarkable about this is Keynes’ moral blind spot. He was blithely unaware of the diabolic immorality of his pragmatism. He seems to have assumed that his crude paean to economic growth chimed with human nature. This is unfair given what Keynes wrote on the ‘animal spirits’ and given his commitment to the good life. But this is precisely what the subordination of everything to material expansion entails.

Discussions of ends and the good society have disappeared from public life. Means have been enlarged to the status of ends. The assumption is that the good life depends not on values and virtues but is instead conditional upon the satisfaction of all needs, of needs inflated into wants by the stimulation of desire. Such satisfaction is thus extended into infinity. Once there, human beings can

once more be virtuous and live the good life. To philosophise is to quickly unravel the myriad fantasies and illusions involved in such pretence. Philosophising exposes the worship of means as an alienation, revealing the hopes which induce human beings to sell their souls and their futures to be illusory. So philosophy must go.

It cannot be stressed enough that philosophy does its best, and most dangerous, work in the gap between the 'is' of 'the real world' and the 'ought-to-be' revealed by intellectual illumination. It is for that reason that philosophers are frequently held in suspicion and are seldom popular. To be radical is to go to the root. Philosophy is by definition radical in that it examines the fundamentals concerning the nature and aims of society. Philosophy reveals the ever-increasing expansion of the modern economy to be a nihilism, an endless expansion that does not serve human ends and is instead solely concerned with accumulating further means to material expansion. It is on this nihilism that the obsession with material growth is founded. It is a nihilism that slowly diminishes and finally dispenses with human ends.

Gandhi castigated 'systems so perfect that no one will need to be good'. His point was that there is never any means so perfect that human beings need not attend the problem for being good. Morality is a quality of individual human beings, individuals together in society, managing their relationships with each other. Individuals must be morally responsible. Morality is not a function or a product of technology, money, systems, institutions, growth, progress. As the ancient Greek concept of *Paideia* and the German idea of *Bildung* both recognise, human beings need to learn to be good in society, in relation to each other, in a public life that nourishes the good life for human beings. In contrast, the perfection of means deprives human life of its meaning, projecting systems so perfect that no-one needs to be good, material wealth so great that no-one needs to be good.

That even someone such as Keynes could accommodate himself to such nihilism testifies to the power of instrumental thinking in an age which worships the idols of science and technology, money and state power, in the place of God, in the place of morality. If God is dead, then human beings are charged with the responsibility

of creating what Nietzsche called the new, 'joyful', morality. It is significant that Nietzsche, arguing for the 'Gay Science', should come to criticise the modern state and its attendant idolatries. It is only by emancipating themselves from the worship of the idols of the state and the economy and technology that human beings, philosophising, could come to play a radical and inherently moral role in the development of new values. The extent to which instrumental rationality has supplanted morality has had an enervating effect on modern society, spreading the illusion that there is a technical, material answer to the questions of moral ends.

Keynes' 100 years is nearly up. In strictly material terms, Keynes has been more than vindicated. There is much greater material wealth in the world and it is shared – albeit very iniquitously – amongst a much greater number of people. But, of course, as Keynes realised, the good life is not strictly a material question. Keynes was no fool. He well understood the distinction between needs and wants. He knew that needs of food, shelter, security could be satisfied. He also knew that wants are capable of infinite expansion and could never therefore be satisfied. He missed the extent to which the deliberate stimulation and inflation of wants could keep people on the hedonistic treadmill in perpetuity. And the snare is there in Keynes' diabolical principle that we must 'pretend' that foul is fair until sufficient means have been accumulated to be able to afford virtue 'once more'.

Keynes' use of the words 'once more' really gives the game away. It shows a recognition on Keynes' part that human beings were moral once before, *in the days before material expansion*. This acknowledgement invalidates the view that morality is a function of affordability. Keynes' diabolism – which is the Faustian bargain that the modern world has made with material power – is not the way to salvation. Philosophers and theologians, the old Biblical prophets and the sages of the East have always insisted that such bargaining is the way to ruination. Spinoza's principle of God/Nature is suggestive in this respect. Whereas once it was God who destroyed the world with the Flood on account of human immorality, it now seems that Nature is set to punish the immoral behaviour of human beings. The Faustian approach of modern society presumes that Nature possesses an infinite stock of everything we want in order to become moral

‘once more’. What Nature supplies is more than ample for human need, which is finite, but nowhere near enough for human greed, which is infinite. This collision between the finite and the infinite will force human beings to reacquaint themselves with eternal principles.

And it will be a *reacquaintance*. Keynes’ words indicate that he well knows that human beings were once moral *before* the era of material expansion and that, therefore, human morality is independent of, rather than a function of, material expansion. Keynes states that, with sufficient material wealth, ‘we shall then once more value ends above means’. The ‘once more’ indicates that humankind must have once valued ends above means sometime in the past. There is therefore no reason at all to postpone morality until human society becomes sufficiently materially rich. It was all said in Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*. Scrooge scolds his nephew, why is he so happy when he is poor? The nephew hits back, then why are you so miserable, when you are rich? Buddha was a wealthy man, a prince, who found that material riches did not bring happiness. He gave all his money away and lived in poverty. Except that poverty did not bring happiness. He concluded that happiness is not a function of materialism, of riches and poverty, but of a different quality entirely. Virtue is virtue and has nothing to do with riches and poverty. Why, then, must we wait to be rich in order to value ends over means ‘once more’?

Keynes’ instrumental immorality — whatever is foul is fair, whatever useful is good — is the Faustian bargain upon which modern times are based. Keynes is worth quoting because he well understood the crudity of the utilitarian calculation. The important thing is that he connives at the suppression of ends as an economic necessity. Morality is openly sacrificed to material growth. But what is human life if it is lived without ends? If ends are subordinated to means? Man does not live by bread alone. Capitalism can supply bread in such quantities as to encourage obesity on an epidemic scale. There is too much bread, too much pandering to the physical self, and too little attending to other essential aspects of a truly human life. As John Ruskin stated in *Unto this Last*, ‘There is no wealth but life’, but this life of ends has been stultified and choked by material excess. Material riches only nourish life in certain ways. Material riches can feed us

in body, but not in spirit; they can occupy us, distract us, even amuse and entertain us, but they cannot make us happy. Material riches can fill the holes were the soul once was, but they can never make us whole again.

Materialism is a false philosophy, but no less alluring for that. It is seductive and addictive, not so much in what it delivers as in what it promises – entertainment, information, protection, a great quantity of all things. It seems able to solve all human ills. That it has yet to do so, that the world is becoming increasingly gross, insecure, ill-informed and downright dangerous, does not make the material promises any the less appealing. Part of the attraction seems to lie in the exaltation of human power. It is a form of self-worship, human beings becoming as gods, the deification of humanity. Human beings have found immortality in their technology.

What is lacking is meaning. There is a wealth of means but an almost complete absence of ends. Modernity is incapable of addressing questions of morality, values and culture. It addresses questions of spirit and soul only to pour scorn upon them. In accordance with the instrumental rationality which is at the core of modern society, the focus is placed firmly upon mechanisms, rules and laws to the exclusion of purposes, goals and principles. This may have the form of meaning and a sense of design, but it lacks the content. Human beings as teleological beings can differentiate between mechanism and purpose and well understand that mechanisms, rules and laws have nothing to do with ends and are therefore bereft of meaning. For this reason, meaninglessness keeps rearing its ugly head despite a wealth of material means. It seems to be a paradox but it really underscores the inversion of means and ends at the heart of modern society. Until that inversion is addressed, the accumulation of quantity will continue to misfire, delivering material riches at the expense of human happiness.

Turning now to this question of human beings aspiring to the knowledge of gods (Bronowski) and of human beings having to become as god in the absence of God, Bronowski insists that, in seeking knowledge, we continue to recognise the fact that we are fallible and hence the possibility that we may be wrong.

When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known; we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgment in science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible. In the end, the words were said by Oliver Cromwell: 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ: Think it possible you may be mistaken.' We have to cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power. We have to close the distance between the push-button order and the human act. We have to touch people.

Bronowski 2011 ch 11

This is where philosophy began with Socrates. Only this I know, that I know nothing. Socrates was the wisest because he knew, most of all, that he did not know. The pursuit of truth takes precedence over the truth and the whole truth as such. Philosophy is as concerned with the limits of reason as with the possibilities of reason. We can only know what reason can do by knowing what it cannot do. It is only by respecting those limits that reason remains rational, sane and sober. Fallible. Beyond that, reason turns into its opposite. The point is more than that philosophy is the ability to support arguments with reasons. Philosophy does much more than this; it checks hubris and acknowledges and creates space for the non-rational dimension of life. Hubristic science makes a crude division between the rational and the irrational. Critics of (hubristic) science are thus by definition irrational. These are not the only two choices. This is a wholly false antithesis. In addition to the rational there is the arational and the non-rational, neither of which is against reason. To insist that everything and all things be rational and that anything not rational is irrational and therefore illegitimate is to push reason into areas where it does not belong and can make no positive contribution. It is an invitation to irrationalism by way of reaction.

The clash between science and religion, knowledge and belief, is misconceived, to the human detriment. The clue lies in Bronowski's statement with respect to the Nazi

concentration camps. ‘This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known; we always feel forward for what is to be hoped.’

Which implies that human beings can never have ‘the knowledge of gods’. Science as a human form of knowledge is fallible. Human beings can never have full and complete knowledge, the knowledge of the whole. They can map the whole but they cannot know the whole, certainly not as individuals. Knowledge of reality is not the same thing as that reality as such. It is our knowledge of that reality, as extensive or as limited as our cognitive abilities. The limits of reason are in part the limits of human cognition. The cognitive resources of human beings are finite. Individually, human beings are able to absorb so much data and information, and only so much time in order to process it into knowledge. To ascend further up the levels of cognition to understanding and wisdom at the summit requires even more time. The human species as a whole can aspire to this summit and embark on this journey. The individual members of the species are finite beings with limited time and resources. Reason is not and can never be enough. Human beings can never have the knowledge of gods. It is impossible to know everything. This is the point against the arrogant, hubristic attempt to extend reason into all domains in the belief that science can explain everything. It is also the point against the idea that individuals should be free to choose. Human beings can never have sufficient information and knowledge to be able to choose in such a way as to necessarily promote freedom. For this reason, human society will always rest upon belief, faith, habit, convention, practice, custom, tradition, trust, ritual, routine. The truth or otherwise of this statement can be tested by anyone by simply examining the events of the day – going out, driving to work, going for a bus or train, going shopping, using the telephone, the computer and so on. Much of the decision making was tacit, assumed, unconscious rather than deliberate. The vast majority of human actions do not require a deliberation upon and conscious choice of reasons. Life would be impossible if no action were taken and no decision made without sufficient reason. This is the moral of Buridan ass.

Good fences make good societies. There is a need to exercise care so as to avoid conflating scientific, philosophical and religious rationality. Philosophising thus reveals that, given finite cognitive resources, it is irrational rather than rational, to

establish the scientific model of rationality as the single ideal for cognitive behaviour and to extend its mode of reasoning throughout social life.

There are good reasons to rely on belief, authority, habits and customs. Each individual, is a finite being with limited time and faculties, scientists and even philosophers. Confronted with specific tasks and unique situations within various social environments, human beings cannot wait for sufficient reasons before deciding and acting. No-one, not even scientists, have sufficient time and resources to check every possible theory and method and evaluate every possible eventuality and outcome. Without relationships of trust, without customs and habits and a whole web of tacit assumptions, individuals would be unable to pursue their goals and realise their ends. The wealth of information to check and justify rationally exceeds the cognitive resources of each individual. Even philosophers. In doctoral research and writing, taking anything on authority is anathema, for good reasons. To make an argument and then write ‘as Richard Dawkins says’ followed by a quote from the great man does not prove the truth of any statement made. Dawkins is cited because his point agrees with the one previously made – it doesn’t prove it, it repeats it. But how many years does it take to write a doctoral thesis? That time is not available in everyday life. Which is why the everyday lifeworld is one of solidary exchange, trust, reciprocity. Individuals routinely take particular things to be true or otherwise, but do so out of faith, belief and habit. There simply isn’t the time to trace the origins of these assumptions to their sources. Memory fails and life is not lived with a set of always-available notes covering every eventuality.

Society and the individuals composing society would simply not function properly if everyone started to ask for the reasons explaining and justifying everything that is done. This is not to deny the importance of asking for reasons. After years of watching dull, boring, overpriced football, whilst watching Liverpool and Middlesbrough dozing their way through some end of season excuse for a football match, I asked myself the question ‘what am I doing here?’ I couldn’t supply any valid and reason and have never been to a football match since. I had never missed a home game for years before that. It is good to keep questioning. Above all, keep questioning, Einstein insisted. But ration it. Tea or coffee? Earl Grey? Typhoo? Why tea? Why not?

Lime? Lemon? Teak, mahogany? The ability to ask the right questions is what distinguishes the true philosopher from the charlatan, the dilettante and the irritant.

Human beings do any number of things each day without asking for sufficient reason, without asking questions, without demanding answers. There often isn't sufficient reason. Life would simply become impossible if the norms of rationality came to set at the highest level. As finite beings, human beings possess limited cognitive resources, with only so much time and intelligence available in any given situation. (Stenmark 2004).

This begs the question of sufficiency and how high or low it is pitched. What level of reason and evidence is required to meet the criteria of sufficiency? Rationalists require that human beings be rational in their behaviour and be able to give good reasons for every action they perform and every decision they make in their everyday world, at work, at home, in every activity. Evidentialists require that human beings give evidence in support of their actions in their everyday life. The question is how many reasons and how much evidence would be required? How high is the threshold of justifiable behaviour. To be wholly rational in this vein is to adopt a complete scepticism with respect to the world, demanding that the rational foundation for everything be established. This extreme demonstrates the extent to which it is not rational to be wholly rational. The demand for good reasons and evidence in support of any decision and action can proceed only so far before it becomes an entirely unreasonable approach to life. The intelligent way to governing life involves reason and evidence in combination with belief, habit, custom, faith, trust, authority. Which is another way of arguing that intelligence is not simply a quality of choosing and deciding individuals but must be invested in social institutions, relations and practices as the accumulated wisdom of a society. Individuals lack the cognitive resources necessary to govern everyday in an intelligent manner. Further, in being limited, these resources - time and intelligence - are too valuable to be dissipated in an endless scrutiny of all our beliefs and actions.

The possibility of wasting a lifetime asking for sufficient reason and evidence to justify belief or action is the moral of the tale of Buridan's ass. Jean Buridan was the pupil of William of Occam, the philosopher known for Occam's razor – never multiply

entities without reason. Cut out the inessential, see the wood for the trees, throw out unwarranted assumptions and assertions. It is the principle of parsimony, which explanation makes most sense of the available details with no need for further arguments and assumptions.

The story of Buridan's ass emphasises the danger of over-rationalizing choice. Placed midway between two haystacks, the rational ass has to choose which stack to eat. The stacks are of equal size and are of equal distance from the ass. The ass can find no good reason to choose one stack over the other. There are no good reasons to influence choice. And so the donkey lacks a rational basis to act, does nothing and starves to death as a result. Of course, a real ass wouldn't think about the issue and would wonder over to one stack or the other for other than rational reasons. And that's the moral. The rational ass demands reasons before acting, and refuses to act in the absence of reasons. The lack of good reason to choose one thing rather than another makes it irrational to act and therefore rational to do nothing. Of course, it is rational, in the sense of making sense, to do *something*. What is irrational is demand that that something be justified by good reason. This cannot always be done, and it is irrational to think and act – or fail to act - as though it can.

In the absence of reason and evidence, the most rational thing for people to do is to continue to follow a tried and tested path, trusting to what is known until good reasons and evidence can be discerned to justify alternative courses of action. This approach throws the challenge back to the rationalists and evidentialists. People do not need to justify every thought and action with good reasons and evidence, if their life is busy unfolding in a more or less reasonable way. The burden of proof is on the rationalists and the evidentialists to supply the reason and evidence for an alternative course of action. In other words, the world of custom, habit, tradition, authority, convention etc – the accumulated wisdom and intelligence of generations and ages – is intellectually innocent until proven guilty. The social life of human beings is based on trust, in others and in our beliefs, and should not fall under the cloud of suspicion without good reason and evidence. The everyday *ethos* of human beings as practical philosophers is one of trust rather than the distrust that rationalists and evidentialists seek to impose.

The points are made with a view to restoring philosophy to its original meaning as an *ethos*, a practice, a way of life. Philosophising and living go hand in hand.

Philosophy is not primarily something that philosophers think but something that they do. As Karl Marx argued in Thesis VIII on Feuerbach: 'All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'. To Socrates and Plato, the pursuit of truth matters more than truth as such. The truth is acquired by practical action, by philosophising according to Socrates and Plato, by changing the world and oneself in the process according to Marx.

'In a word: You cannot transcend [aufheben] philosophy without realizing [verwirklichen] it' (Marx EW CHPR:I 1975:250). As philosophy becomes worldly, the world becomes philosophical. Philosophy becomes worldly in galvanizing and energizing those social forces which possess the structural capacity to transform existing reality so as to realise the philosophical ideal. Further, this transformed reality signifies the end of philosophy as something apart from the affairs of human beings in 'the real world'. Philosophy is realised when its ideal becomes real. Human beings must incorporate philosophy's 'ought to be' within an 'is' transformed by creative human praxis infused by ends.

Philosophy as a radical activity changing the world is philosophising, an act of living which normatively confronts an unphilosophical reality as an act of critical judgement upon it, measuring 'individual existence by the essence, the particular reality by the Idea' (Marx MECW I 1975:85). In the process, 'as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly' (MECW I 1975:85). Addressing its own defects as the defects of the real world, philosophy could go in two directions, entering the real world, which is the 'turn about of philosophy, its transubstantiation into flesh and blood', or further distancing itself from the real world, retreating to the ivory tower.

The act of the first side is critique, hence precisely that turning-towards-the-outside of philosophy; the act of the second is the attempt to philosophize, hence the turning-in-towards-itself of philosophy. This second side knows that the inadequacy is immanent in philosophy, while the first understands it as inadequacy of the world which has to be made philosophical.

MECW I 1975:86

Marx seeks the realisation of philosophy, emphasising its role as a critical and normative activity which generates the demand that the unphilosophical world of the 'is' be brought into correspondence with the philosophical 'ought to be'. For Marx, 'philosophy does not exist outside the world' (MECW I 1975:195). The time must come when philosophy 'comes into contact and interaction with the real world of its day... it becomes the philosophy of the contemporary world' (MECW I 1975:195/6).

In arguing that philosophy must encounter 'the real world' of everydayness, Marx seeks to bring philosophy into a more creative and transformative relationship with the world, changing it from within. In engaging with the real world of power and conflict, philosophy becomes active and political, 'secularised' by being drawn into struggle. Marx develops the radical implications of normative 'rational' philosophy into a demand for the 'ruthless criticism of the existing order, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries nor from conflict with the powers that be' (Marx 1975:207).

You only learn how to swim by jumping into the river. Hegel's point is that philosophising as a world changing and life changing activity is not about producing abstract truth, just as driving is not a matter of reading a car manual or the Highway Code. The rules to any game are much more complicated than the game itself. How many rugby players know the laws of the rugby? It is only in playing the game that all the dull and difficult elements fit together and fall into place. There are many things that can only be learned by practice. Instead of sinking to the bottom of Hegel's river, you learn to swim. And in the process you may come to learn to do more, without necessarily being able to verbalise all that you come to know, in the sense that the mind comes to direct the body in ways that bypass conscious, logical deliberation. But in the process, you may come to transcend your original intentions and capabilities. I would argue that this is the meaning that is sometimes missed when Heraclitus' argued that 'you never step into the same river twice'. Plutarch (*Qu. Nat.* 9120) adds the explanation: 'for fresh waters

are flowing on'. Indeed they are. There is common consent as to the meaning of this parable. For Plato (*Crat.* 402 A), the lesson is 'that everything moves on and nothing is at rest' and is an allegory of 'existing things' in general. In the *Theaetetus* (1600) Plato states that in the view of 'Homer and Heraclitus and all that crowd' all things move 'like streams'. Aristotle remarks that Plato was familiar with 'the Heraclitean theories that all sensible things are for ever flowing ' (*Metaph.* 987332). The Heraclitean idea that all sensible things are for ever flowing led Plato to conclude that knowledge of the sensible world was impossible and that the possibility of knowledge depended upon transcendent Forms.

But I see another meaning to the Heraclitean view, one which places the emphasis upon the transformation of the subject and not just upon the transformation of the object. Yes, the river is for ever flowing, so that it is the same river but different. The sensible object changes. But the person stepping into the river also changes. Stepping into the river changes the person. Here, we are back to Hegel and 'you only learn to swim by jumping into the river'. The subject entering the river develops new capacities which go beyond original capabilities and intentions, thus becoming a different person. In which case, you can never step into the same river twice; the water might be the same, but it's a different *you* the second time around. This is an aspect of worldchanging and peoplechanging as a singular process. If Heraclitus was aware of this, that less obvious meaning was neglected by his successors, who focused on the changing of the river. The transformation of the object and of the subject is a singular process.

The idea of philosophy as *ethos* savours a little of Foucault, who was keenly concerned with restoring ethics to its origins in *ethos*. There are differences, however, and it is worth spending some time with Foucault to make it clear that a philosophical *ethos* remains philosophy, committed to rational arguments with respect to the true, the good and the beautiful, and is not the subsumption of philosophy into a way of life as such.

Philosophising in the sense of *ethos* is a practical discipline that proceeds from the definition of learning as a change in behaviour, teaching its practitioners to discover new capacities of mind and heart. This idea of philosophy as a practice and a way of life runs throughout the argument of this book. It is perfectly possible to

critically evaluate the arguments of differing philosophers and present the teachings of different schools according to their truth or falsehood. However, independently of a philosophical way of life, this activity is one of commentary rather than philosophy. It is only possible to discover the truth by living it, by embedding the act of philosophising in practice, ritual and ethical action. Like any skill, philosophy demands hard work, discipline, perseverance.

The Daoists refer to the 'knack' as something acquired by constant practice. For Zhuangzi (370-311 BCE), it is pointless trying to analyse teachings logically. He cites the carpenter Bian: 'When I work on a wheel, if I hit too softly, pleasant as this is, it doesn't make for a good wheel. If I hit it furiously, I get tired and the thing doesn't work! So not too soft, not too vigorous. I grasp it in my hand and hold it in my heart. I cannot express this by word of mouth, I just know it.'

To acquire this 'knack' is to discover a transcendent dimension of life that is much more than 'the real world' as an external reality, something 'out there', but is instead something identical with the deepest level of being. One recalls here Heidegger's criticism that philosophers have spent so long analysing what it is 'to be' that they have completely neglected 'Being'. Philosophers in the analytical tradition accuse Heidegger of mysticism; Heidegger retorts that they have given up their philosophical birthright. There is no doubt, however, that this reality as something identical with Being has affinities with God, Dao, Brahman or Nirvana. But at what point have we left the realm of philosophy and entered the realm of religion. The Tao is unnameable. 'He who says does not know; he who knows does not say'. Such notions cannot be explained in terms of *logos*. In being beyond reason, they are beyond the province of philosophy. 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein *Tractatus*). When there is nothing to say, it is best to say nothing. Better to be. Better to live philosophically. There is a presumption that the antonyms rational and irrational exhaust all possibilities. Not so, there is also the arational, outside of the realm of rational experience but not irrational on that account.

Mary Midgley has argued well on the dangers of an overextended scientific rationality. Midgley argues that human beings are unable to understand the

world by reason alone and must make use of myths or visions. It is impossible to enjoy a life without meaning and value. The problem is that scientific rationality cannot deliver such meaning and value, as scientists themselves know. The problem comes when science gets ambitions which lead it out of the realm of means, the realm of the 'how', and seek to enter the realm of ends, either to colonise, determine, dismiss or destroy. The world of meaning and value is not any the less important for not being amenable to scientific rationality.

The crucial question is how conscious, and hence self-critical, we are or can be with respect to the visions we are prone to deploy. 'If we ignore them, we travel blindly inside myths and visions which are largely provided by other people. This makes it much harder to know where we are going' (Midgley *Science as Salvation: a Modern Myth and Its Meaning*).

The reflective worldview that is concomitant with the philosophical mind foregrounds the fact that human beings often do not know. They are not irremediably ignorant, in that they can come to know. But the attitude should be that whilst we do not know, we can find out. It is this pursuit of truth which matters more than the truth as such. This is the point to establish when Bronowski refers to the dangerous consequences that follow when human beings aspire to the knowledge of gods. It is the pursuit of truth that matters, and this pursuit is always fallible and always falls just short of the whole truth. This tallies with Socrates' central insight that although we are higher than the beasts of the field, we are also less than gods. This is the insight that hubristic science is inclined to forget, with who knows what consequences.

Philosophy, in the danger zone between science and religion, provides a framework within which to steer clear of the twin reefs of belief alone and knowledge alone. Socratic philosophy comes with inbuilt stabilisers which keeps knowledge moored to humility and checks the hubristic temptation. The assumption of an ignorance open to enlightenment invites a profound intellectual illumination which continues to recognise inherent limits. There is

a need, then, to analyse the conditions of the pursuit of truth so as to remove the potential for hubris inherent in the scientific conception of knowledge as power. Reason cannot be rational without the awareness of inherent limits; it is not possible to fully explore what reason can do without the recognition of what reason cannot do. It is this last proposition which one misses in certain scientific traditions, with their tendency to view science as a way of transcending limits altogether.

The problem of hubristic science is magnified by the tendency to denigrate and devalue other forms of knowledge and insight, as though the scientific worldview is the only worldview that matters. This can draw us into some very uncomfortable areas, areas which invite philosophical investigation and speculation. The new sciences of artificial intelligence and robotics beg the question as to what exactly intelligence is, what consciousness is, and, ultimately, what it is to be human. The hubristic temptation is based on the assertion that since something can be done, it must be done. Why not? That's the question put to the critics by those too blinded by possibility to recognise limits. Is it possible to email ourselves as an attachment via our genetic code? If we could do it, would we do it? Is this any different to air travel or space travel? Imagine if we could send our genetic code across time and space by means of a teleporter. If our mind and body are dissolved in this place as they come to be reconstituted in the other place, there seems to be no problem. It would certainly speed up travel. Those impressed with the possibilities of such an invention are hardly likely to go looking for what could go wrong. And, of course, if everything goes according to plan, nothing could go wrong. The fact that things do go wrong is continually met with the cry that, according to the science, nothing should have gone wrong. It is the doctrine of scientific infallibility. It shouldn't go wrong. But let's get philosophically interesting and suppose that, God forbid, infallible science errs and the process goes wrong. As mind and body come to be reconstituted in another place, they are not dissolved as they should have been in the original place. One person suddenly becomes two, like Roger Moore in the film *The Man Who Haunted Himself*. Who is the real person? Exactly the same mind and body exist in two different places, with one as much the real person as the other. Would the people who

were completely happy with the idea of teleportation when it works still be as happy? The notion of artificial intelligence brings up questions as to just what constitutes humanity. Is humanity more than mind and body as biological entities reducible to code?

A little learning is a dangerous thing because the learned forget the extent to which their learning is little. By nurturing right thinking, philosophy seeks to place a humanism of humility as against hubris at the heart of human life.

Scientific rationality, for all it analyses and explains – which is a lot – cannot deliver meaning and value of itself. This is something that has been accepted, even insisted upon, by scientists and philosophers of science. As such, the observation is banal. The problem is that, regardless of the conscious thoughts of the practitioners themselves, the inversion of means and ends upon which modernity is constituted has fostered the continual encroachment of instrumental rationality into all domains of human life. This extension of means is a powerful inducement to hubris. Science, as the quotes from Russell make clear, deals with means and cannot determine ends. Science can show us the best means to certain ends and can aid any project seeking the satisfaction of certain ends. But it has nothing to contribute in determining and choosing between ends. Science will always be one the one side of the means/ends, how/why, objective/subjective, fact/value, material/spiritual divide. There is no problem so long as the various domains of human insight and knowledge remain in their right place and true relation, their validity and legitimacy recognised and respected. The Faustian bargains which the modern world has been all too willing to strike with the idols of industry and state is the real source of the hubristic temptation, not science. But this hubris soon develops into a complete faith in the methods and results of science above and against all others for determining truths. The great irony is that this culture of scientific rationality generates a pervasive unease and disquiet since, denuded of meaning and value, the world is no longer the house of being. Only one part of the human being is satisfied, even satisfied to excess. We accumulate quantity to the neglect of quality. Thus we are well fed but less happy; we have much in our physical wealth but are less in our psychic health; we have more possessions but have less time; we live with more knowledge but less wisdom. (see Mark Vernon 2007: 187/8).

The American sociologist C. Wright Mills criticises the character of work and leisure in contemporary society: 'Each day men sell little pieces of themselves in order to try to buy them back each night and weekend with the coin of "fun"'. Human beings can find fulfilment in neither work nor leisure in this kind of society. Leisure does not provide the fulfilment which is denied in the work undertaken to earn the coin of fun. Consumption is no compensation for alienated labour. The techniques of mass persuasion and manipulation have been employed to stupefy 'the masses' via the leisure industry with organized spectator sport, gambling, 'movies', radio and television. These leisure 'activities' offer stupefaction rather than fulfilment. Mass leisure activities 'astonish, excite and distract but they do not enlarge reason or feeling, or allow spontaneous dispositions to unfold creatively'. They create a fantasy world into which the masses escape in non-work hours, a world in which 'the amusement of hollow people rests on their own hollowness and does not fill it up'.

In practical and in contemplation, philosophy enlarges reason to such an extent that we achieve wisdom. This is philosophy as the love of wisdom, with Sophia, the goddess of wisdom. The philosophical tradition founded by Socrates offers a way of living that is practical as well as contemplative. Socrates was the wisest of all in that, in claiming to know nothing, had no kind of hollowness at the heart of his life.

15 THE RATIONAL UTOPIA – beyond the 'is' and the 'ought'

Philosophy is not just about understanding the world, it is about changing the world and changing ourselves for the better in the process.

The word philosophy means the love of wisdom, of Sophia, the goddess of wisdom, and this is how the first philosophers understood philosophy. Wisdom contains three aspects: firstly, knowledge, secondly, upright good conduct, thirdly, beauty. In other words, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful – epistemology, ontology and aesthetics in their mutuality. The idea of philosophy therefore entails the love of true human knowledge, good human conduct and inherent beauty in their indivisible, harmonious unity. The love of the unity of the true, the good and the beautiful is the highest value of philosophy.

Spinoza's ethics are firmly based on the intellectual appreciation of the one single self-subsistent entity God/Nature. The 'intellectual love of God' is the highest form of philosophic wisdom and is achieved through the recognition of facts and their meaning without the intrusion of subjective fears and hopes, impassively, without sentiment. This is the intellectual virtue of attaining acquiescence, objectivity, in face of rationally ascertained truth. This is to achieve eternal life through the intellectual love of God/Nature: 'he who understands himself and his emotions loves God, and the more so the more he understands himself and his emotions' (E 5, 15). Arising necessarily from the pursuit of knowledge, this delineates an intellectual love of reality, what Spinoza calls *amor intellectualis Dei*, through activity of mind. And such a mind rejoices constantly in the object of its contemplation. Subject and object merge to form a single intelligible substance.

The subject of this appreciation is reason: the human being of philosophy is the "rational being" and the love of wisdom is always *amor intellectualis Dei*.

The unity of the true, the good and the beautiful is the ideal of philosophy, the 'ought-to-be' which forms the measure by which the 'is', 'the real world', reality (metaphysics), is evaluated. Philosophy does its best work in the gap between the 'is' and the 'ought to be'. A philosophical viewpoint arises through the tension between what 'is' and what 'ought to be'. This is what makes philosophy radical and dangerous.

The charge that philosophers live in ivory towers remote from 'the real world' is an old one, going all the way back to Aristophanes and his completely mistaken view of Socrates as one who lived 'up in the clouds'. Socrates is famed for bringing philosophy down to earth and into the political and moral affairs of human beings, finally being condemned to death on a point of principle. That indicates just how radical and dangerous philosophy can be. But there is an element of truth in the appearance that philosophy is something that seems to proceed from some elevated vantage point at some distance from 'the real world'. This results from the fact that philosophy works in that gap between the way that the world 'is' and the way that reason shows the world as it 'ought to be'. This implies that without that gap, there would be no philosophy. This seems to be what Marx meant by arguing that the

realisation of philosophy is also its abolition. Philosophy becomes worldly and the world becomes philosophical. The gap between the 'is' and the 'ought to be' is closed and the world 'is' and the world 'ought to be' are merged. The ideal and the real become one and the same.

It is a lofty ambition. It challenges the philosophical convention that one cannot derive an 'ought-to-be' from an 'is'. This convention imposes a dualism of value and fact and comes with the corollary that the world is denuded of moral meaning. Value comes from outside the world.

This is a world demoralised. The dualism of fact and value is primary in that it invites what Max Weber calls the 'disenchantment' of the world. By this, Weber means that the world is robbed of purpose as means come to replace ends.

Tackling the dualisms of fact and value, means and ends is one and the same process. The two go together. I'd like to take a closer look at the philosophical convention that an 'ought-to-be' cannot be derived from an 'is'.

Whilst there has been a philosophical convention since Hume that you cannot derive an 'ought-to-be' from an 'is', the more one thinks about it, the more the idea of a boundary between fact and value becomes untenable. Facts have moral implications whilst, in turn, values interpret facts. That, of course, does not necessarily mean that the one shapes the other. The precise relationship between fact and value is contentious.

Aristotle studied biology and other physical sciences and sought to bring his knowledge of the natural world to bear upon his politics and ethics. The idea that a being or an entity possesses an essence and therefore is essentially something, with a potential to be actualised in an end state, characterises essentialism in science and philosophy. It comes with the implication that something that 'is' also potentially 'ought-to-be' something more in its completed state. Something of this essentialism can be clearly discerned in Hegel and Marx. For Hegel, the 'ought-to-be' is the 'is' of the future in the process of becoming. For Marx, social reality is a field of materialist immanence. It is no coincidence that Karl Popper singled out Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Marx for criticism in his *The Open Society and its Enemies*. These thinkers are essentialists who held the 'is' and the 'ought-to-be' to be in close relation.

Popper criticised Marx in particular for his ‘historicism’ and ‘moral futurism’. What Popper meant by these terms was that Marx transferred responsibility for human action from individual agents to an anonymous history and its ‘laws’. This is wrong but it is easy to see why Popper, stuck in the dualism of methodological individualism and methodological holism, could make this error. Marx, like Hegel before him, did see future society as immanent in present society. The role of creative human agency lay in realising these immanent lines of development. In this way, the future is neither completely determinate nor indeterminate. Marx entertains no dualism of structure and agency. Human agency is creative but can realise only those possibilities contained in a given social structure. Any ‘ought-to-be’, then, already exists as a latent, unactualised potentiality within the ‘is’.

Unable to see how Marx relates the ‘is’ and the ‘ought-to-be’, Popper sets ‘Marx the maker’ in opposition to ‘Marx the prophet’. In truth, the two go together. As Marx wrote in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: ‘Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.’ (Marx EB SE 1973).

Upholding the fact/value distinction in a way that Marx did not, Popper failed completely to understand Marx’s position. Marx assigned an active role to creative human agency in actualising the lines of development which are immanent in existing society. The realisation of these lines may be necessary for future growth but they are not inevitable. These lines of development are frustratable. Human beings may fail to act or may be prevented by political and social means from taking action. But if human beings act as responsible moral beings and realise the potentialities for an alternate future immanent in existing lines of development, then fact and value coalesce in such a way as to shape the future. Marx’s ‘futurism’ is grounded firmly in the moral agency of human beings, not in the ‘laws of history’. Popper is simply wrong on this point. The future is morally justified not merely because it is *inevitable* but because it is *necessary* with respect to the realisation of the human ontology. This future is realised not by the inexorable unfolding of laws of history but because it has been brought about by creative human praxis in pursuit of the end of human fulfilment.

The key point is that the fact/value distinction is a commonplace of Anglo-American philosophy but has a much lesser prominence in other philosophical traditions. This philosophical convention can certainly be challenged. Daniel Dennett is currently mounting such a challenge.

If "ought" cannot be derived from "is," just what *can* it be derived from?.. . ethics must be *somehow* based on an appreciation of human nature—on a sense of what a human being is or might be, and on what a human being might want to have or want to be. *If that* is naturalism, then naturalism is no fallacy (Dennett, p. 468).

If one accepts that the 'ought-to-be' cannot be derived from the 'is', then either we have to just discard it altogether as an impotent irrelevance or we have to make it up arbitrarily and impose it on reality from the outside. The former amounts to a moral disarmament, the latter to a violence of abstraction perpetrated on reality. Neither position is tenable.

The great irony is that this philosophical convention in its modern form derives from David Hume. Hume's purpose in making this distinction was to demonstrate the impossibility of deriving an 'ought-to-be' from the concept of God. The 'is' is now understood to be Nature rather than God. This has worrying implications for atheistic materialists. For if the 'ought-to-be' cannot be derived from the 'is' of Nature, it seems that we have no alternative but to have recourse to the made-up concept of God. Such a notion has the potential to disturb the normally imperturbable David Hume.

The philosophical convention might be a commonplace but it is a philosophical mess. All that can be said in its favour is that at least it is managing to hold an uneasy peace between science and religion at present. Many shy away from challenging it for this reason. But I doubt that the convention can last much longer, given the massive advances currently being made by science in the materialist explanation of the physical universe. Scientific knowledge is increasingly swallowing up vast areas of human life, so much so that the point will soon be reached when questions will be asked of the status and conditions of moral truth. The time cannot be far away before science makes a claim to a share of the moral action.

I believe that there is such a thing as moral truth. But it is less and less clear that this truth belongs in the domains of ethics, philosophy and religion alone. Evolutionary biology and psychology and neuroscience are shedding new light on human morality, with the result that science will be entitled to a say on the question of moral truth. The problem is that the philosophical distinction between fact and value has served to cut morality off from all aspects of human knowledge, begging the question of from what an 'ought-to-be' can be derived. If philosophy wishes to make good its claim to be able to discern and deliberate upon moral truth, and thus resist the inroads that science is making in this area, then it has to find some way of breathing new life into the old Aristotelian essentialism. This means grounding ethics in an understanding of human nature, affirming the distinction between the human being as s/he is and the human being as s/he could be if s/he realised his/her *telos*, thus coming to conceive a politics and ethics which is devoted to the realisation of the *telos* of human freedom.

The consensus view in both religion and science is that whilst science can explain and describe the factual world, it can say nothing about values, and whilst religion can pronounce on moral matters, it has nothing to contribute to the stock of scientific knowledge. Whilst many have been content, if not altogether happy, with this peaceful coexistence, there is an increasing sense that scientists are seeing less and less reason to respect these boundaries and are eyeing up the moral terrain as fertile ground for colonisation. I believe that, in the near future, this distinction between fact and value will be increasingly challenged by scientists working in the fields of biology and neuroscience. These scientists will make the claim that questions of meaning and morality can be addressed through science. In part, this challenge is motivated by the anti-religious animus that is prevalent in the new scientific atheism. These atheists are not content to leave religion alone and want to challenge its supposed monopoly of the moral terrain.

Beyond this crude 18th century materialist prejudice, however, there is a much more serious development underway.

I am open to the claim that scientific advance makes it possible to go beyond the fact/value distinction. I can anticipate evolutionary biology and psychology attempting to conceive morality in terms of human and animal well-being, viewing human beings as self-aware, conscious creatures coming to flourish within a moral universe. This is a morality that is connected to the human ontology – the ‘is’ of Nature - rather than being defined in terms of some abstract moral code of rules – an impotent ‘ought-to-be’. This would allow us to affirm an essentialism which repudiates those autonomy-denying structures and relations which work to contradict and inhibit the human ontology and which in turn promotes those arrangements which correspond to and enhance this ontology. This begs the question of just what the human ontology is, a question which science can certainly address. But not science alone. Science can reveal human nature. But what human beings actually do with their nature is a matter of culture. Human nature has a history. Marx was an essentialist who pointed to history as a process of human self-creation, human beings thus incarnating their essence within specific, alterable social relations. Whatever science reveals about human nature, this human nature is not an unalterable given that determines morality and culture in any simple, linear sense. For Marx, the human essence unfolds as a result of human self-creation through labour. Hence Marx’s argument in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844:

It can be seen how the history of *industry* and the *objective* existence of industry as it has developed is the *open* book of the essential powers of man, man's psychology present in tangible form; up to now this history has not been grasped in its connection with the *nature* of man, but only in an external utilitarian aspect, for man, moving in the realm of estrangement, was only capable of conceiving the general existence of man - religion, or history in its abstract and universal form of politics, art, literature, etc. - as the reality of man's essential powers and as *man's species-activity*. In *everyday, material industry* (which can just as easily be considered as a part of that general development as that general development itself can be considered as *a particular* part of industry, since all human activity up to now has been labour, i.e. industry, self-estranged activity) we find ourselves confronted with the *objectified powers of the human essence*, in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*, in the form of estrangement. A *psychology* for which this book, the most

tangible and accessible part of history, is closed, can never become a *real* science with a genuine content.

Marx EW EPM 1975: 355

Marx's argument points to a definition of freedom as creative human self-determination. For Marx – as for Rousseau and Kant before him - this notion of self-realisation entails a demand for universality, pertaining to the human species as a whole. If science is serious about morality, then it has to take this creative human agency in ethics and politics seriously. Human nature has a history, revealing the unfolding of the human essence as the creative endeavour of the human species. The danger is that scientists will enter the moral terrain only to insist on the primacy of scientific fact as against the creative role of values. Reality determining human praxis will be set within the narrow deterministic constraints of neurobiology. This is not a serious moral position at all, but a plain scientific determinism that inverts the true relation and denies the radical moral indeterminacy of the future. Creative human praxis determines the future by treating biological fact as potentiality and capacity, not as inevitability and destiny. That's why human culture is infinitely varied and complex, despite the same species make-up. That's why the future continuously evades prediction.

A challenge on the part of science to the fact/value distinction is perfectly legitimate, so long as scientists take morality seriously rather than simply reading values off from neurobiological and biochemical fact. We have been this way many times before, and in the recent past too. Sociobiology was full of lessons for human society drawn from the behaviour of chimpanzees. Did any sociobiologist come close to the work of Tocqueville, Marx, Le Play, Tonnies, Simmel, Weber, Durkheim, Tylor, Robert Park, Radcliffe Brown, Mannheim, Veblen, Malinowski, Pitrim Sorokin, Erving Goffman, Parsons, Merton, Mills, Elias, Bauman, Gurvitch, Levi Strauss, Touraine? Not one work of sociobiology could be placed against even the lesser works of Anthony Giddens. The best of the sociobiologists is E.O. Wilson, a writer I have a lot of time for. But reading Wilson it soon becomes clear that he isn't so much as developing sociobiology at all so much as demanding that sociology be replaced by biology. (Wilson 1978).

Sociobiology has long since lost its lustre. I read David Barash in the hope of some great revelation with respect to human nature. (Barash 1977; Barash 1980). I wanted to ground political and moral claims in biological fact. We are in desperate need of an infusion of new knowledge, ideas and perspectives to divert humanity from its suicidal path in politics, and my hope was that biologists could uncover something essential in human nature pointing to a future in which we all may flourish.

We learned a lot about chimpanzees, but precious little that we didn't already know about human society. In *Beauty and the Beasts*, Carole Jahme writes:

These days Molly Badham's bonobos and gorillas at Twycross Zoo have taken to painting and to watching television. The apes at the zoo love putting the telly on at night and watching sex and violence... But the apes seem to hate party political broadcasts - can we blame them?

Jahme 2000 ch 8

Evolutionary biology *has* shed great light on the evolution of human intelligence, the importance of social expertise and proximity in the development of the extended brain. There is a wealth of good books in this area. (Byrne and Whiten ed 1988; Hauser 2006; Ridley 2003; Barkow, Cosmides, Tooby 1995; Sussman 1999; Longair ed 1997; Workman and Reader 2004).

There is plenty of good work being done in this area. But it's going to take a sociologist to sort out the implications for human society. Thus far, biologists have fallen far short. They are, at least, pointing in the right direction. It is for sociologists to take that further. Rather than issue a hands-off approach to the biologists, it is more profitable to see what sense their work can make of key problems in the humanities and social sciences.

I am, however, sceptical of the large claims currently being made for neuroscience and its ability to explain everything. Even Bob Dylan! We have heard all of this before. After much scientific huffing and puffing, the mountain laboured and brought forth – Positivism, scientific socialism, Social Darwinism, eugenics, sociobiology, genetic determinism and now, neuro-determinism. History is littered with such

determinisms. The future never turns out as expected, for the simple reason that human beings are like that, they can see a trend, see where it is going, decide against, and act otherwise. The facts which enhance or inhibit a good life are discerned and evaluated not merely by biological functioning but by an ethical anthropology.

And at the heart of this anthropology is reason, the rational faculty of *homo sapiens*. This points to the anthropological significance of philosophy, philosophy as something essential to human flourishing, human beings *being* what they have the potential to become.

Philosophy is distinguished by the clarity of rational argument. Socrates' claim that he knows nothing is not a celebration of ignorant, uninformed 'common sense' but an *invitation to philosophising*, to 'philosophising together', thinking with each other in order to come to know. This is the pursuit of truth which never ends. We may come to know but we never know enough and never know it all. Know-it-alls are ten a penny and worth less than that. Philosophy does not value knowledge as such but is more concerned with intelligence in the evaluation and application of knowledge. This is what makes for understanding and, ultimately, for wisdom. Philosophers guide people in their thinking and lead them by means of rational argument into the clear light of the true, the good and the beautiful. Enlightenment, the way and the light. Philosophy is intellectual illumination.

Philosophy addresses human beings as reasoning beings. The purpose of philosophy is to show the way to freedom through reason. Philosophy seeks to lead rational human beings to the recognition of what reason shows 'ought to be' — from the myriad confusions, inanities and illusions of the 'is' into the realm of the true, the good and the beautiful. And philosophy's goal is inclusive rather than exclusive. Socrates' invitation to 'think together' is open to all human beings as rational beings, in so far as they have the nerve and the nous to seek and to recognise the true, the good and the beautiful by means of their own reason.

This requires courage.

Immanuel Kant assigns to philosophy the role of realising nature's plan for 'universal enlightenment' in the civil and political state. (Peter Critchley *Kant*:

Reason as the Realisation of Nature 2001; Peter Critchley *Kant and the Ethics of Rational Nature* 2007). If philosophy's goal is enlightenment, Kant conceives this enlightenment to be 'the human being's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.' Enlightenment represents humankind's maturity as rational natural beings. Immaturity is for Kant the 'inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another.' This is why philosophy requires nerve as well as nous. Individuals should have the courage to think for themselves, to lead themselves by their own nous rather than allow others to lead them by the nose. Kant expresses this sentiment in his motto of the enlightenment - "*Sapere aude*" or 'Have the courage to use your own reason!' Dare to be wise! Dare to be a philosopher (Kant *Political Writings* 1991:54).

Kant taught not so much philosophy as how to philosophize.

We meet here the paradox of emancipation. It is too simple to oppose the philosophical ideal to the worldly real since the conceptual apparatus of rational human beings produces not only the 'ought to be' to be achieved but also the 'is' to be altered. Whilst the 'is' is constituted from the 'ought to be', the 'ought to be' must itself be *deduced* from the 'is', otherwise it would not be possible to lead or guide the rational thinking beings in the world of the 'is' up to the enlightened condition of what 'ought to be'. To be able to 'lead up' to the categorical imperative, Kant needed the *fact of conscience as something that exists*. That is, the ideal is in some way already immanent in the real world.

One solution came from Hegel, who located the ideal as the progressive unfolding of reason within the real. The progress of reason to the consciousness of freedom. Another solution came from Marx, whose notion of praxis identified the social world as a human product which could be recognised and organised as such by human beings. In changing our circumstances, we also change ourselves. Changing the world is also a self-change. Human transformation and social transformation thus coincide in human practice.

Both solutions enable us to find a home in the world we have built around us.

This is the key question for Hegel:

The ignorant man is unfree because he faces a world which is foreign to himself, a world within which he tosses to and fro aimlessly, to which he is related only externally, unable to unite the alien world to himself and to feel at home in it as much as in his home.

I am at home in the world when I know it, still more so when I have understood it.

The path leading from knowledge to understanding to wisdom is the rational way of philosophy, leading human beings as rational beings to be at home in their world. That transcendental quality which points beyond any existing world of the 'is' to a better future gives philosophy something of a utopian dimension.

Goodwin and Taylor write well on utopianism in this practical sense of what it is to be a political as well as a rational being.

Underlying all forms of utopianism is the conviction that optimistic, imaginative thought and action are capable of bringing about a change towards not only a new social existence, but a better one. The sources, of such optimism are, in the last analysis, difficult to define, and it may be that the only logical justification for optimism is that optimism seems to be a characteristic of the individual's psychology and (arguably) biology. What would life be like if optimism were eradicated from the individual's personality and his creative imagination? And what, furthermore, would be the consequences if optimism were eradicated from our attempts to comprehend and mould the society in which we live? We have tried to show that a certain kind of optimism is a precondition for a worthwhile earthly existence. As long as man has the capacity to identify evil, then he is likely to feel the urge to transcend evil and seek goodness and beauty in his personal relationships, his artistic creations, his religious life and his social and political organization. Historically, beginning in the civilization of the ancient Greeks, the study of politics first emerged as a rigorous method of assisting man in this quest for the good life. Consciousness

of the difference between existing reality and a non-existent, but potentially existent, future - a morally desirable future - was one of the most important ingredients of this quest. Unless we feel absolutely confident that we have now reached the limits of our capabilities and creativity, that we have advanced to perfection already, to dispense with utopianism would be to renounce a large part of what it is to be a political animal.

Goodwin and Taylor 1982:253

A rational awareness of the gap that exists between the world that exists and the world that reason shows could potentially exist – the morally desirable future – is the philosophical quest. For this reason, philosophy can be defined as the ‘rational utopia’.

The philosophical ideal can be designated a ‘utopia’ since philosophy holds that the ‘ought to be’ of the true, the good and the beautiful is a transcendental ideal that counts as the most real of all that exists, the ultimate reality to which the real world of mere unreflective existence, the ‘is’, must conform.

Philosophy is ‘rational’ this ideal is presented to those who have the nerve and the nous to use their reason and think independently, to those who are disciplined and systematic thinkers who have the courage and the capacity to know the true, the good and the beautiful.

Thus, as Agnes Heller argues at length in *Radical Philosophy* (1984), philosophy is the ‘rational utopia’, the ideal ‘ought to be’ which challenges the reality of the ‘is’.

We are now into Plato. Truth, Beauty and Goodness is the Platonic trinity – the divine intelligible order of Forms accessible by our innate concepts.

To sum up at this point and take our bearings. We have seen:

- Descartes’ ‘clear and distinct ideas’ apart from the senses promise intellectual illumination that gives us an appreciation of the real world behind the illusory world revealed by the senses.

- The distinction between opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge (*nous*).
- The distinction between appearance and reality.
- How morality and rationality are integral parts of the good life leading to human happiness, not merely as conditions but as constitutive elements of the good life.

All of this and more is in Plato.

16 PLATO'S CAVE

It has been said that the whole of Western philosophy is a set of footnotes to Plato. This was the view of Alfred North Whitehead, himself a mathematician of some distinction (*Principia Mathematica*) who went on to do excellent work in the field of organic philosophy (*Science and the Modern World*). If anyone should know, Whitehead should. Plato covered a wide range of issues and raised questions that have been debated ever since.

In the seventh book of *The Republic*, Plato uses an analogy to illustrate his view of human experience and his theory of knowledge (epistemology). In the process, Plato explains the human predicament in coming to understand the world, the real world as opposed to the world revealed by the senses. In an allegoric view, Plato presents human beings as living in a cave, with their legs and necks chained so that they cannot turn their heads around. These prisoners can only see in front of them. They can neither turn their heads left nor right, but are chained so that they can only look forwards. Above and behind them is a fire which is blazing away at a distance. Behind the fire is the mouth of the cave. Between the prisoners and the fire there is a raised way; before them is a low wall, built and raised up like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show their puppets. The fire casts shadows onto the cave wall, and this is all that the prisoners can see. The situation is akin to a cinema in that the prisoners watch the shadows of objects projected onto the wall via the light of a blazing fire. These prisoners in the cave are ordinary human beings, the men and women of 'common sense', living in what they take

to be 'the real world'. Within these limitations, the prisoners attempt to discern the truth of the world of the cave by making sense of the shadows of the objects as they dance across the wall before them.

Of course, the senses mislead the prisoners. The shadows on the wall are not reality at all, only its illusion. The prisoners in Plato's cave are the poor ordinary men and women of common sense. These are the people who often claim to 'live in the real world', not the ivory tower world of the philosophers. They cannot see how that supposedly 'real' world is merely a world of shadows, images and illusions. They are prisoners, not just in a physical sense, but in a mental and psychic sense. They cannot see beyond what their senses tell them, and their senses deceive them as to the true nature of reality. Fortunately, there are some amongst them who are philosophers, who distrust the senses and are prepared to question what they see and hear. They try to turn and use their heads in order to see beyond the cave and see into the 'real' world.

Plato's allegory of the cave is remarkably contemporary. The fire is used as a projector to cast shadows on the wall in precisely the same way that images, words, sounds and sound bites are used in politics, media and advertisement to beguile and deceive the ordinary man and woman as they use their ordinary common sense to try to understand the real world. Much of politics and debate proceeds at the level of opinion (*doxa*) and takes the form of shadow boxing concerning illusions rather than realities. The puppeteers remain firmly in place, owning and controlling the fire, and projecting images to control the information (the shadows) put before the senses. This is done to keep the people captive; it is a means of mental and psychic control. The people live in a psychic prison. And a further question is this, who or what pulls the strings of the puppeteers?

The men and women of common sense are the prisoners. The rulers control them by shaping images. However, this power of illusion is merely the illusion of power. Human beings should be free and, indeed, could be free. We emancipate ourselves by asserting our power to apprehend ultimate reality through the use of our innate concepts. In this grasp of innate concepts, we press beyond common sense to assert

our power to make reality. We use our innate concepts to grasp ultimate reality in the light of the sun. This is Enlightenment as the goal of philosophy.

For Plato, our sense experience gives us shadows, not reality itself. This is the normal way in which things are experienced by men and women in their everyday life.

A prisoner breaks free so that he can turn round. He sees the fire and he sees the objects which are casting the shadows on the wall. His first impression is that the objects are not as 'real' as the shadows he has been accustomed to seeing. But he is drawn by the sunlight to the mouth of the cave. When he goes into the sunlight, it becomes clear to him that his former way of perceiving was only of shadows, not of reality. It becomes clear to the prisoner that his former way of perceiving gave him only shadows, not reality. Plato is making the point that philosophy is the journey from seeing particular things to seeing the eternal realities of which these particulars are mere shadow-like copies.

Plato's point is that philosophy is the journey from seeing particular things to seeing the eternal realities.

The cave is the world of particulars.

Outside is the world of Ideal Forms.

The cave is the world of appearance – the shadows on the wall.

Outside is the world of reality.

The world of particulars is accessible by the senses and generates only opinion.

The world of Forms is accessible by reason and generates knowledge.

The world around us, the world of particulars presented to the senses, is not the real world, but a shadow-like copy of the ultimate reality. It's like mistaking what you see in a mirror as the true object rather than as the reflection of it.

Sense experience merely shows us the appearance of reality. Reality is the realm of the Ideal Forms.

A book that you may happen to have in the room is *a* book. It is a *particular* book belonging to the world of particulars. But it is not *the* book. *The* book is an Idea or Form, ideal entities we know conceptually.

The meaning of Plato's cave is clear enough. The cave represents 'the realm of becoming' - the visible world of our everyday experience, where everything is imperfect and constantly changing. The prisoners are ourselves, living in a world of opinion and illusion, while the escapee, breaking the chains, gains true knowledge of reality.

The cave is the realm of becoming, the world outside the cave represents 'the realm of being' - the intelligible world of perfect, eternal and unchanging truth.

What we have here is a distinction between appearance and reality. Much of what appears to the senses, sense data, is illusory. The senses tell us that the world is flat. The world is not flat, yet the senses tell us that it is. True knowledge of the shape of the world changed the whole way in which people came to think and act, revolutionising the practical lives of everyone. 'The real world' in which the men and women of common sense live, is a world constituted by reason and knowledge, not common sense. Applying this reasoning to politics and society, and ask questions as to who rules and why, gives some understanding of just how dangerous and radical this distinction between appearance and reality is. Plato challenges us to see through and break through the veil of illusion that covers normal life. Which begs the question of just how this is possible. How can human beings attain the structural and epistemological capacity to free themselves from the world of shadows?

It is striking how many philosophers throughout history have been exiled or executed. They are trouble. And the reason philosophers are trouble is made clear in this allegory of the cave. The escaped prisoner who now knows the nature of ultimate truth and reality re-enters the cave as a philosopher and is anxious to disabuse his benighted former companions of their illusions. Those illusions are the only reality they know. They won't listen, think he is a fool, and even threaten to kill him. They are comfortable with their illusions. They are convenient illusions that make life

bearable. How is it possible to open the eyes of the people so that they are able to see the greater possibilities that lie before them?

Such is the usual plight of the philosopher — ridicule and rejection - in attempting to bring enlightenment and set people them on the path to knowledge and wisdom. Plato's teacher, Socrates was executed by the Athenian state. It's a hard life being a philosopher. It's much safer to be a prisoner in 'the real world' of illusion. That is to submit to the life of the drone. It doesn't yield a truly human life.

17 PLATO'S IDEAL FORMS

On first impressions, the visible world seems quite sufficient to account for itself. It is an immense system which operates according to its own laws and principles, with a mechanism of cause and effect, such that it is possible to trace any effect back to a preceding cause without any need to postulate any purpose or extraneous goal outside of the system. Yet, since human beings are teleological beings, seeking meaning and value, they cannot regard this world of physical cause and effect as self-sufficient. Throughout history, many philosophers, scientists, theologians and artists have been struck by the thought that the world is not actually how it appears to the senses and that what we see around us is not the 'ultimate' reality at all, but a world of illusion. To such visionaries, the real world is somehow *hidden* from the senses. They have suggested that, if only it could be possible to penetrate the veil of illusion that conceals this reality from us, we would see, hear and experience something truly extraordinary.

For John Henry Newman, the visible world is 'the instrument, yet the veil, of the world invisible—the veil, yet still partially the symbol and index: so that all that exists or happens visibly, conceals and yet suggests, and above all subserves, a system of persons, facts and events beyond itself'.

The visible world lies all around us, the real world easily accessible by the senses. The invisible world is also all around us, but is veiled and hidden, an eternal and unchangeable realm. This invisible world is the true and ultimate reality, the Intelligible World as conceived by Plotinus. The essential point is that these two worlds, visible and invisible, are not antithetical but lie under the general plan of the one, ultimate reality. Much of the operation of the visible system can be apprehended

by the senses. Events can be isolated for examination and their causes explained. General laws can be discovered not only in the physical life of the visible world, but also in its moral, social and political life. However, sense experience can apprehend and explain only so much. The whole consequences and causes of any given thing in this physical order is ultimately beyond our sense. And if this is the case in the visible world, then it is even less possible to comprehend the system of the invisible world, which is not so open to inspection.

The origin of this kind of thinking can be found in Plato's theory of forms.

It is worth examining these ideal forms and innate concepts at some length, for they are the key to emancipation. What is the theory of forms? According to Plato, those objects that we seem to see around us - chairs and tables, trees and mountains, ants and planets - are not what is ultimately real. They are mere shadows or reflections of the truly real objects - the *forms*.

Plato holds that the world around us, the world presented to the senses, is not the real world, not the true reality, but an approximation or a lesser copy of the truly real. Take books, for example. According to Plato, each particular book is a fleeting reflection of a form: the form of 'book'.

There is also a form of the table, a form of the chair, and so on. These forms differ from the particular tables and chairs we observe around us in a number of important ways. The forms are *more real* than are the particulars that 'partake' of them. Indeed, particular books derive what existence they have from the form of the book. If there was no form of the book, there could be no particular book.

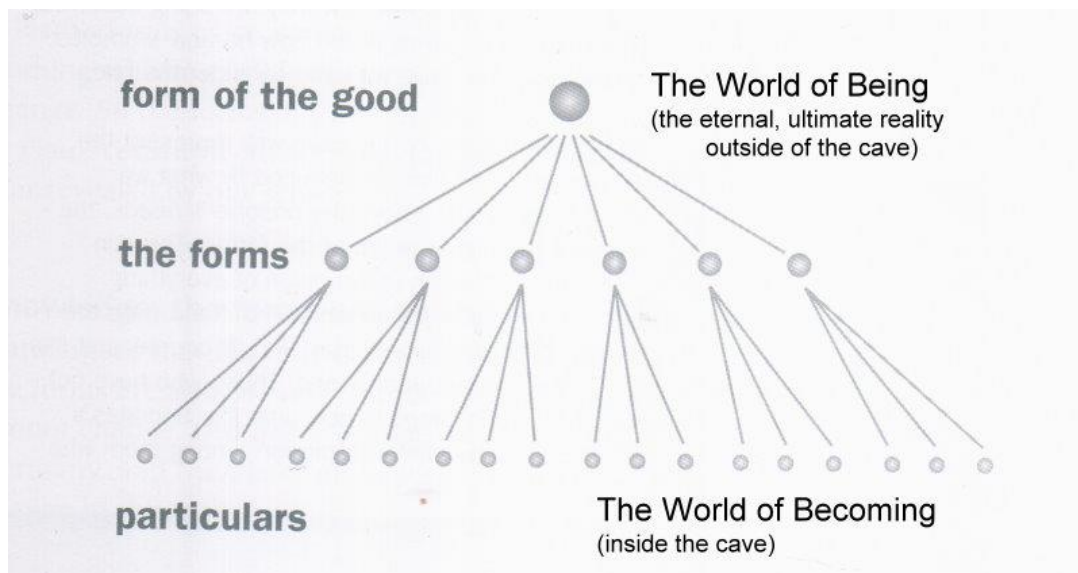
The pen I am holding is not the real pen, the one and the true pen, but is *a* pen. It's like mistaking what you see in a mirror as the true object rather than as the reflection or copy of it. That eternal realm of ideal forms is for Plato the true reality. What we see presented to the senses is merely what exists, what is, a world of particulars. Sense experience merely shows us the appearance of reality, not reality as such.

The forms are eternal and unchanging. Particulars come and go. A particular tree grows, then dies, then rots and is gone. The form of the tree, by contrast, is

eternal. It neither comes into being nor ceases to be. Nor do the forms change. Our ideas change, of course.

If Plato's forms exist, where are they? They are not located within the tangible, physical world. Nothing within sensible reality is ever perfect and everything is in a constant state of change. So the forms, if they exist, must exist on a higher plane. The forms, according to Plato, constitute an eternal, changeless, perfect reality - a domain more real than that revealed by our senses.

One of Plato's key arguments for the forms is often referred to as the *one-over-many argument*:



The ultimate form - the form of the forms - lies at the apex of a hierarchical structure. Towards the bottom are particular, sensible objects - a particular cow, a particular bed, and so on. These objects cast shadows and create reflections. These shadows and reflections derive what existence they have from the particulars, of which they are mere fleeting, imperfect copies. But the physical objects are themselves mere fleeting copies of the higher forms, to which they in turn owe their existence. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, we find the form of the forms, upon which the forms in turn depend for their existence. The form of the form is that which all the other forms have in common. What they have in

common is existence and perfection. So, the form of the good is the ultimate source of all existence and perfection. It is also, claims Plato, the ultimate source of all knowledge.

There is here a distinction between opinion and knowledge. Sense experience can give us only opinion. We can have knowledge only of the Forms, the ideal entities that we can know through reason.

The 'ought to be' of philosophy is therefore the confrontation of what is most real with what 'is', with what is less real. Plato argues that we can have knowledge only of the Forms, which are abstract entities we can know through reason. In contrast, the senses are limited to the ordinary experience of empirical existence. We can form only opinions through sense experience.

Plato doesn't just argue that we can have knowledge only of the Forms. He also argues that our concepts are derived from the Forms. When we think, we apply concepts to what we experience, which involves knowing what 'equality' or 'beauty' or 'rose' mean. These concepts do not derive from experience. We can't form concepts by classifying experiences, we classify experiences by already having concepts. So, Plato argues, we have innate knowledge of concepts. Concepts are our recollection of the Forms, which we (our souls) experienced before birth.

Plato advances another argument against thinking that concepts derive from experience. The fact that we all have different experiences implies that we would all form different concepts. But then how could we ever talk to each other and share ideas? Yet we do mean the same thing by the same word, meaning that our concepts can't be formed by our different experience, but by something else that we all share, viz. innate knowledge of the Forms.

To sum up here:

There is here a distinction between opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge or reason (*nous*).

Sense experience in the world of particulars can only give us opinions.

Reason through our innate knowledge of concepts can give us knowledge of the Forms, the ideal entities that are the true reality.

These concepts do not derive from experience of the everyday world of particulars around us.

We don't form concepts by classifying experiences, we classify experiences by already having concepts.

If concepts did derive from experience, we would all form different concepts since we all have different experiences.

But then how can we talk to each other and share ideas?

If concepts did derive from experience, we would all form different concepts since we all have different experiences. But then how can we talk to each other and share ideas? We are able to communicate by something that we all share, innate concepts giving us knowledge of the Forms.

Communication is possible because human experience is intersubjective and mediated by something that we all share, innate concepts giving us knowledge of the Forms. We define the things of experience the same way, even though our particular experiences may differ.

The meaning of Plato's allegory of the cave is clear. The cave represents our existence in 'the realm of Becoming' - the visible world of our everyday experience, a shadow reality where we live in a world of illusion, capable only of opinion. Human beings are prisoners in this world of ordinary experience. This begs the question as to the value of democracy when the individuals composing the *demos* are capable only of opinion. Thomas Jefferson refers to manacled people by their own consent; William Blake referred to the mind forged manacles of man. But the mind, the innate concepts, make emancipation from the world of the senses possible. The escapee, breaking the chains, and penetrating the veil of illusion, thus comes to gain true knowledge of reality. The world outside the cave represents 'the realm of Being' - the intelligible world of perfect, eternal and unchanging truth. It's the world of knowledge which we can access through reason, the *nous* and through moral and intellectual courage, as Kant acknowledged.

One can refer here to philosophising as ascending the levels of cognition, from sense experience to intellectual illumination, from data and information to knowledge and from there to understanding, all the way up to wisdom at the summit. True emancipation is based upon enlightenment as measured by the ascent from the lowest rungs of cognition up to the highest level of wisdom at the top. For Plato, the journey from the shadows to the sun is an ascent through levels of cognition, from instincts, wants and desires at the level of immediacy up to reason at the summit, from the ordinary experience of common sense to the intellectual appreciation of ultimate reality.

The idea of democracy and freedom as individual liberty, opinion and choice traps individuals on the lowest rung of the levels of cognition, restricting people to the immediacy of appetite and desire and effectively promoting what Aristotle condemned as licence in the place of liberty. This is an illusory freedom and democracy.

If freedom is conceived to be limited to the satisfaction of desires – as it is in Hobbes and in the individualist liberal tradition generally – then human beings remain enslaved to impulse. They continue to mistake the shadows for true reality, they remain subject to the manipulation of the opinion formers, the puppeteer/rulers.

A distinction between the democracy of opinion on one hand and the democracy of function on the other remodels politics according to the levels of cognition – ranging from egoistic instinct, desire, wants in the short term to altruistic common wisdom in the long run – with traditional left-right divisions ranged according to these levels. From this perspective, it becomes more important to ascend the levels of cognition than continually contend a point stuck on the same level. The politics of subjective opinion is like one of those computer games, where the players remain stuck on the first level, unable to develop the skills required to progress to the next level.

The philosophy of Spinoza emphasises the freedom as the intellectual appreciation of reality defined as the one single substance of God/Nature. Eternal life is achieved through the intellectual love of God or Nature: ‘he who understands himself and his emotions loves God, and the more so the more he understands himself and his

emotions' (E 5, 15). Arising necessarily from the pursuit of knowledge, this delineates an intellectual love (*amor intellectualis Dei*) through activity of mind. Such a mind rejoices constantly in the object of its contemplation. This is given political expression by Spinoza in the argument that 'the more man is guided by reason, the more he is free'. Freedom is achieved by ascending to the higher levels of cognition, overcoming the passions to achieve understanding of the world and one's place in it.

To be free, according to the individualist tradition, is to do what one wants. The point is that the individual here is not free but is subject to desires and impulses that are mechanically or physiologically determined.

The rationalist position founded by Plato affirms a positive conception of freedom as the creative realisation of the rational human essence, achieved by ascending the levels of cognition from the limited freedom of appetite and desire to the true and full freedom of reason.

The idea of a ubiquitous general law which pervades the whole visible and invisible world together gives a sense of what Nicholas of Cusa called the 'divine concordance of the Universe', or what Burke describes as the 'eternal society . . . connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place'.

This notion of everything being in its appointed place could imply some kind of organic hierarchical functionalism that comes to violate principles of democracy, individual liberty and equality. This needs to be born in mind when opposing a democracy of function to a democracy of opinion. Plato himself has been criticised for an elitist functionalism which arranges society according to a hierarchy of orders. A way through here is suggested by Jacob Bronowski, who comments on the age-old conflict between intellectual leadership and civil authority. Bronowski writes well here about John von Neumann, mathematician of genius and a pioneer of games theory. Neumann made a distinction between short-term tactical thinking, which is predictable, and long-term strategic thinking, which is not. In the context of Platonic idealism, as it has been developed here, such a view is clearly disposed towards the greater freedom which results from a higher order strategic reasoning. Bronowski comments that von Neumann was in love with the aristocracy of intellect. 'And that is

a belief which can only destroy the civilisation that we know. If we are anything, we must be a democracy of the intellect. We must not perish by the distance between people and government, between people and power, by which Babylon and Egypt and Rome failed. And that distance can only be conflated, can only be closed, if knowledge sits in the homes and heads of people with no ambition to control others, and not up in the isolated seats of power' (Bronowski 2011 ch 13).

Can Plato's concept of the philosopher-ruler be democratised? I believe it can and this democratisation of philosophy forms the central thread of this book.

18 PLATO AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Let us return to the well-known aphorism 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', This is a paraphrase from Plato's *Symposium*, where it means something very different from what we take it to mean.

The phrase 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is a subjective view, a definition of beauty which is relative to the particular eyes of each subject. An objective view changes the phrase to the divine beauty which is beheld by the eye, the object not changing regardless of which particular eyes view it. This is Plato's conception, an objective world of ideal forms in an immutable realm accessible to the intellect and, anticipating the sections on Kant, the moral law within.

The beauty beheld by Plato is a divine beauty which exists in an immutable, unchanging realm of ideal forms.

Recent research in the field of the psychopathology of language has led to the conclusion that the loss or the severe impairment of speech caused by a brain injury is never an isolated phenomenon. Such a defect alters the whole character of human behaviour. Patients suffering from aphasia – losing the power to use or comprehend words – have lost not only the use of words but have undergone corresponding changes in personality. They can perform the tasks of everyday life. But they are at a complete loss as soon as the solution to the problem requires any specific theoretical or reflective activity. They are no longer able to think in general concepts or categories. Having lost their grip on universals, they stick to the immediate facts – as

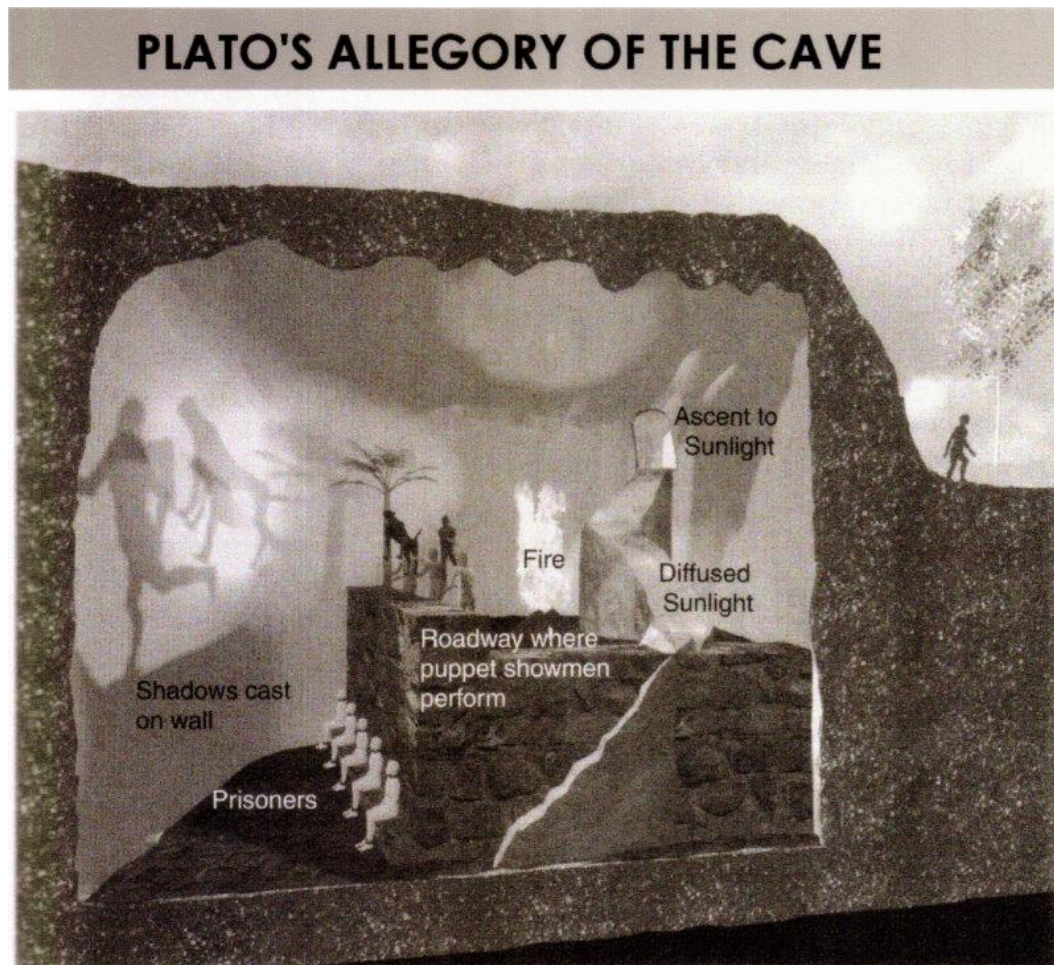
presented to the senses (sense data/experience); they stick to concrete situations. Such people are unable to perform any task which can be executed only by means of a comprehension of the abstract.

All of this is highly significant for it shows us to what degree that type of thought called reflective is dependent on symbolic thought (the cognitive apparatus of intellect).

Without symbolism, the life of human beings would be like that of the prisoners in the cave of Plato's famous simile. Human life would be confined within the limits of the senses, wholly determined by biological imperatives and practical interests. In the absence of symbolism, human life could find no access to the 'ideal world' which is opened up and accessible from different sides by art and philosophy, science and religion – all different ways of approaching the 'One'.

Plato's eye beholding beauty is the inner eye, the symbol making intellect that can come to an appreciation of the ideal, immutable order that is divine beauty.

I want now to develop the distinction between a ruling elite who are the makers of images and who govern by manipulating opinion, and the demos as the makers of reality and who govern by knowledge. This is not how Plato presented his case, but is what is entailed by the democratisation of philosophy.



If we look at the picture, we see not only the shadows on the wall, but how these are shaped by the puppeteers. The puppeteers are the rulers, an elite who manage the masses through the manipulation of images. The manipulation of images – the puppeteers are the rulers, the makers of images, the demos are the makers of the real world, yet are prisoners of illusion.

When we see the puppeteers, the question of the nature of the illusions becomes the question of who shapes the illusions. The puppeteers have the capacity to define the image and hence shape the reality.

The ideal lies latent, immanent and hidden within the real, the parts of reality that are the most important but which most people, wrapped up in their everyday affairs, fail to see, mistaking the mundane and the ordinary for the only reality there is.

QUOTES TO PROVOKE DISCUSSION

The eyes are organs of asking. (Paul Valery)

What Degas called "a way of seeing" must consequently bear a wide enough interpretation to include way of being, power, knowledge, and will. (Paul Valery)

"The most political decision you make is where you direct people's eyes. In other words, what you show people, day in and day out, is political.. .. And the most politically indoctrinating thing you can do to a human being is to show her, every day, that there can be no change." ~ Wim Wenders

"A picture can be an answer as well as a question but if you can't answer your question try to question your question. There are clever questions and stupid answers as well as stupid questions and clever answers. There can be questions without answers but no answers without questions." ~ Ernst Haas

"We may distinguish between two types of imaginative process: the one starts with the word and arrives at the visual image and the one starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression." ~ Italo Calvino

The elite mediate reality and rule by falsehood, the demos create that reality and rule by truth.

For Plato, the way to penetrate the veil of illusion is through reason, our rational faculty, our innate concepts. We can go beyond opinion and gain knowledge.

In the cave, we are the prisoners. Our rulers control us by shaping images. But this power of illusion is merely the illusion of power. If we interpret our innate concepts as actively creating the world that is cognized, then ultimate reality, the world of Being, is already in some way a human creation and not an eternal given. (I shall argue this case later with respect to Kant and the notion of an innate cognitive apparatus).

We emancipate ourselves by using our innate concepts to apprehend ultimate reality in the light of the sun.

As the journey to the sun outside the cave, the goal of philosophy is enlightenment.

This is expressed in Kant's motto of enlightenment - "*Sapere aude*" or 'Have the courage to use your own reason!'

Kant taught not philosophy so much as how to philosophize. The role of the philosopher was not to teach philosophy but to goad individuals into using their own reason, thus becoming in some way philosophers themselves.

Enlightenment is for Kant "the human being's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity". (Kant *What is Enlightenment?*).

Maturity is defined as the "ability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another.

My old history tutor Ron Noon has an interesting view here: "The ability to persuade people that your representation is the right one is an important source of influence and power." It is easy to see how pervasive this manipulative approach to human affairs is in a world of image and illusion. Such a view fits the reduction of politics to a clash between different illusions in the world of opinion. Reason cannot decide right and wrong at this level of opinion; the politics of opinion is shaped by asymmetries in power, and settled ultimately by force and by violence.

We are a world away from the Aristotelian conception of politics as creative human self-realisation. In *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell gave a definition of the politics of opinion that cannot be bettered.

Political language - and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists - is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable. and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot

change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase - some jackboot, Achilles' heel, hotbed, melting pot, acid test, veritable inferno or other lump of verbal refuse - into the dustbin where it belongs.

It is probably for the best that Orwell didn't live in an age of radio phone-in's and television debates. Political language making lies sound truthful and murder respectable - that defines politics in the modern world. Well over 100 million human beings were killed in the charnel house that goes by the name of the twentieth century, and the world remains caught in the maelstrom unleashed by 'The Great War'. The war to end all wars became the first of the many total wars that disfigured civilisation in the twentieth century. That so many human beings have been killed by a variety of means - shot, bombed, starved, gassed, or killed by the famine and disease that necessarily follow organised mass killing - is not accidental. Numbers of this magnitude can be achieved only if war - politics by another means - is pursued as a conscious end and systematic purpose. The modern world is characterized by technology, war and death. Gil Elliot declares that the scale of man-made death is the central moral and material fact of our time. The modern world, infused with a mass of means, is a veritable charnel house, a world of the dead which dwarfs the world of the living in size and meaning. Human beings who struggle to locate meaning and value in a Faustian world shot-through with instrumental rationality have no trouble finding some real purpose in war and death.

Orwell gives us the tools to see through the way that politicians manipulate language in order to manipulate people. There is a magnificent book by Stanley Wientraub called *The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War*. Orwell was part of this 'last great cause'. Orwell writes well of his 'startling and overwhelming' experience on entering Barcelona: 'It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle.' The prisoners had seen through and broke through the chains of illusion and had left the cave to create something better. Stalin created a bigger, mechanised cave and socialism has been in its Communist prison ever since. Before the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg stated clearly the alternatives that lay before us: 'socialism or barbarism'. The Bolshevik tradition identified socialism with barbarism. The world is crying out for an alternative.

Orwell's politicians are Plato's puppeteers – manipulators of images and of language and ultimately of people. If Plato shows us how to beat them, Aristotle gives us an alternative – the original – conception of politics as creative human self-realisation.

19 ARISTOTLE POLITICS AND THE GOOD LIFE

Aristotle's definition of politics involves a very different notion to the conception of politics which prevails in the modern world. Indeed, the word politics derives from the ancient Greek *polites*, meaning those interested in public affairs (i.e, capable of seeing the bigger picture beyond the individual alone, appreciating and serving the common good). The antonym of *polites* is *idiotes*, referring to those interested only in private affairs. *Idiotes* are incomplete human beings, immature, self-absorbed individuals who are incapable of seeing the greater good and of realising the well-rounded humanity that comes from participation in public life.

Aristotle defines the human being as a *zoon politikon*, a social and political animal who realises himself/herself in relation to others in a *politikon bion*, a public life, a social space which embodies the common good.

Aristotle affirmed a positive conception of politics as creative human self-realisation. Such a conception implies public life as an educative process which, as Aristotle puts it, 'trains' individuals to a good they do not naturally or spontaneously see. Whilst an individualist liberal tradition can reject this for its potentially repressive implications (see J Barnes' *Aristotle* 1981 OUP), the ancient Greek idea of *Paideia* - and the later German notion of *Bildung* – are designed to bring individuals out of their private interest in order to experience a greater freedom in public association.

From this public minded perspective, Aristotle rejects the definition of liberty as 'doing whatever you want' as a licence which ensures that individualism brings not the freedom of each but a universal constraint upon all (P 1981:59/60 332 373/5). Aristotle's view recognises the contextual and communal basis of individual freedom, the very thing lacking in individualist liberalism (Clark 1975:103/4). In

Aristotle's conception, the *polis* is not identical to political organisation but denotes the organised community in all its aspects, comprising all the smaller associations of which individuals are a part as necessary to human well-being. Aristotle's 'state' is no abstract entity like the modern liberal state but is the supreme natural association rooted in the smaller natural associations, each formed 'with a view to some good purpose'. Aristotle's 'state', therefore, is the supreme association of all associations and 'will aim the highest, i.e. at the most sovereign of all goods' (P I.i 1981:54; Edel 1982:319).

The individual-society split which characterises contemporary political thought and practice reflects the taxonomy of the modern state-civil society separation. To Aristotle, individual and society go together as two sides of the same coin. Aristotle's society is not a super-individual organism. Rather, the free individual is at once self-determining *and* social. 'Man is by nature a political animal' who can be free and self-realising as a substance only within the greater substance of the *polis* (P I.ii 1981:59). 'Common interest' brings individuals together in a political association 'in so far as it contributes to the good life of each. The good life is indeed their chief end, both communally and individually' (P III.vi 1981:187). In the best society, freedom and sociality are reconciled. Community is natural for individuals (Clark 1975:110 101/2).

Politics and philosophy were born in the *agora*, the citizen assembly and market place in Athens (Heller 1984; Doyle 1963:ch 2). 'Most modern political ideals – such ... as justice, liberty, constitutional government and respect for the law – or at least the definitions of them, began with the reflection of Greek thinkers about the institutions of the city state' (Sabine 1937:3). Finley presents the Athenian *polis* as an historical example of an expansive public life that may serve as a model for emancipatory urban governance in the modern world. The *polis* was founded upon a 'sovereign assembly .. open to every citizen' and convened at least 40 times a year. The *polis* made a virtue of its amateurish principle. The fact that it was managed by a rotating council of 500, with the chair selected by lot and sitting for just one day, checked the bureaucratic principle. The extensive use of selection by lot throughout the institutions of governance indicated the high value placed upon self hood as something obtained through participation. Free individuals possess *politike techne*, the

skill and techniques of the statesman, the ‘art of political judgement’ (Finley 1973:18).

These political arrangements reflect a philosophical anthropology. The ancient conception defines humanity as a social and cooperative species, possessed of *philia* (friendship) and *dike* (justice). This points to a solidaristic conception of a public life in which each and all unite for purposes of individuation. Human beings are by nature inclined to live in a *polis*. These characteristics of citizenships imply a controlled self-hood, a ‘self-control’ that makes community life possible (Finley 1973:29/30).

Importantly, the *polis* made justice integral to its mode of life. ‘It was the common assumption of the Greeks that the *polis* took its origin in the desire for justice. Individuals are lawless, but the *polis* will see to it that wrongs are redressed. But not only by an elaborate machinery of state-justice, for such a machine could not be operated except by individuals, who may be as unjust as the original wrongdoer. The injured party will be sure of obtaining justice only if he can declare his wrongs to the whole *polis*. The word therefore now means ‘people’ in actual distinction from the ‘state’ (Kitto 1957:72).

The pursuit of justice becomes a question of making available a social identity that connects public and private interest. This social identity was available in the city-state of the *polis*. The city-state is a quite distinct institution from the modern state and understanding its precise character is crucial in envisaging a smaller scale public sphere located in everyday social activities. The all-important political unit in classical Greece, the *polis* was more on the scale of a modern medium sized town than the modern nation state or metropolis (Jones 1964; Davies 1978; Mayo 1960: ch 2). The size of the city-state was kept in check in numbers and in area deliberately so that citizens could meet within its centre and engage in meaningful political activity (Doyle 1963:25).

The obvious question is that, if Athens really was so successful and really did achieve so much in all areas, why did it not presume to conquer and lead the city-states in a unified Greek state. The question would have struck the Athenian – and other Greeks – as illogical. The *polis* is what was integral to the identity of each

individual and nothing beyond the *polis*, no amount of riches or power, could have the remotest significance with respect to that sense of self-identity. As Kitto put it, 'if the Greek was not within a day's walk of his political centre, then his life was something less than the life of a real man' (Kitto 1951:121).

Every Greek knew the *polis*: 'there it was, complete, before his eyes. He could see the fields which gave it sustenance .. he could see how agriculture, trade and industry dovetailed into one another.. The entire life of the polis, and the relation between the parts, were much easier to grasp, because of the small scale of things' (Kitto 1951:73).

Kitto defines the *polis* as a 'community' since 'its affairs are the affairs of all' (Kitto 1957:71). In the *polis*, every Greek understood the functions of other Greeks: 'he could see how agriculture, trade and industry dovetailed into one another; he knew the frontiers, where they were strong and where weak .. The entire life of the *polis*, and the relation between its parts, were much easier to grasp, because of the small scale of things' (Kitto 1957:73).

The *polis* conception of scale is rational in that it is premised upon self-consciousness as the distinctive attribute of the human species. Human beings engage in rational action, are teleological and reflexive beings, projecting ends and reflecting upon their actualisation. Reflexivity is built into human action. Praxis is rational. The human habitat is to be evaluated according to whether it promotes the good life, realising human potentialities, expanding rather than inhibiting the growth of human capacities.

A human habitus is premised upon human scale and is, on that account, a public life in the classical conception. A habitat that is beyond human comprehension and control is unjust according to these premises. For reason of size and quantity, its centralisation and concentration, modern society is overscale and hence inhuman. The exclusivity of its political and economic functions denies citizens the opportunity to participate in the determination of the forces and decisions which affect collective life. Denied the opportunity to participate in public life, individuals lose not only their citizenship but also their sense of self-identity.

The physical form of the *polis* emphasised public space with temples, stadia, the agora (combined market place and public forum) and theatres. This everyday public life made possible an everyday public life in which all could participate. The accent was upon association and interaction. Appropriate scale facilitates public comprehension. The question is not, however, settled by establishing human proportions. Beyond scale, there remains the ethical question of the just and the good. A mode of life qualifies as 'good' to the extent that it achieves material sufficiency and reflexivity in an ethical community founded on justice, participation and mutual justice. This emphasises the importance of the *polis*.

The *polis* embraces much more than the institutional make up and is both the community of citizens and their collective sense of community. There is no equivalent word for *polis* in the modern world. For Kitto, the usual translation 'city-state' may be the nearest we can get but is still a bad translation since the *polis* was not much like a city and was much more than a state (Kitto 1957:64). An Athenian would not have understood the difficulty of translating *polis* but would see clearly how inadequate the term city-state is. To the Athenian, city and state are inextricably linked as one and the same. And to complicate the issue even further, the Athenians did not conceive the city-state in institutional or geographical terms, as a set of institutions or as a definite territory. The *polis* was the people, it's as simple and as complex as that. There is an important distinction to be drawn here between the *polis* and the state. This distinction makes it possible to separate public life from the institutional machinery of the state and locate it in an autonomous self-governing urban realm. Kitto uses the term *polis* rather than city-state so as to describe the reality of a self-governing community. That is the locus of politics in its ancient origins.

The *polis* establishes the social context within which individuals fully realise their spiritual, moral and intellectual capacities (Kitto 1957:78). They realise these essential capacities only in relation to each other. The *polis* is therefore a holistic and moral framework. The *polis* 'is so much more than a form of political organisation. The *polis* was a living community, based on kinship, real or assumed – a kind extended family, turning as much as possible of life into family life..' (Kitto 1957:78). The Athenians conceived the *polis* as a mode of life fostering a sense of community, as a communal *modus vivendi*. The *polis* is an integral part of the realisation of the good

life, is a dimension of it. 'The Greeks thought of the *polis* as an active, formative thing, training the minds and characters of the citizens; we think of it as a piece of machinery for the production of safety and convenience. The training in virtue, which the medieval state left to the Church, and the *polis* made its own concern, the modern state leaves to God knows what' (Kitto 1957:75).

At the heart of the *polis* was a moral purpose based upon a philosophical anthropology. The *polis* was a physical place, true, but more than geography and space it was a collectivity composed of citizens (Chamoux 1965:309; Hansen 1991:62)..

The Athenian city-state was not the republic of Athens in its institutional form but the Athenians constituting itself as a people: 'it is the men that are the Polis' (Thucydides). The Athenians as citizens were the city-state; the city-state had no independent significance but was embodied in the person and idea of *demos*, the people.

Aristotle restricts citizenship to the virtuous minority, the 'middle people' who are superior in goodness and in wealth (P 1981:181 180/3 267 270/2). Nevertheless, Aristotle's conception of citizenship entails a notion of civic friendship that implies an egalitarianism which can carry over into the radical idea of a classless society of equals (Miller 1989:203 204). Aristotle's argument offers a principle that, radicalised as a universal principle, demands an inclusive, participatory public based on the continuous and active involvement of all as citizens.

A state is an association of similar persons whose aim is the best life possible. What is best is happiness, and to be happy is an active exercise of virtue and a complete enjoyment of it. It so happens that some can get a share of happiness, while others can get little or none.

Aristotle 1981:413

The question is how to ensure that all get a share of happiness. 'Property too must belong to these people; it is essential that the citizens should have ample subsistence; and these are citizens. The mechanical element has no part in the state nor has any other class that is not productive of virtue' (Aristotle P 1981:416).

Aristotle argues that whilst 'property should up to a point be held in common, the general principle should be that of private ownership. Responsibility for looking after property, if distributed over many individuals, will not lead to mutual recriminations; on the contrary, with every man busy with his own, there will be increased effort all round. 'All things in common among friends' the saying goes, and it is the personal virtue of individuals that ensure their common use'.

Aristotle is arguing for a system of private ownership and common use. It is a view which presupposes a society of virtuous citizens whose close ties and relations enable them to see and work for the common good as the good of each and all. 'Each man has his own possessions, part of which he makes available for his friends' use, part he uses in common with others.... Clearly then it is better for property to remain in private hands; but we should make the use of it communal. It is a particular duty of a lawgiver to see that citizens are disposed to do this' (Politics II v).

Aristotle asks what is the 'best constitution' and what is the 'best life' for individuals: 'a way of living in which as many as possible can join and, second, a constitution within the compass of the greatest number of states'. Arguing that 'virtue is a mean, and that the happy life is a life without hindrance in its accordance with virtue, then the best life must be the middle life, consisting in a mean which is open to men of every kind to attain. And the same principles must be applicable to the virtue or badness of constitutions and states. For the constitution of a state is in a sense the way it lives'. Aristotle advocates 'moderation and a middle position' as the best. Concerned to avoid extremes of riches and poverty, Aristotle argues that the middling condition 'is most easily obedient to reason, and following reason is just what is difficult both for the exceedingly rich, handsome, strong and well-born, and for their opposites, the extremely poor, the weak, and those grossly

deprived of honour. The former incline more to arrogance and crime on a large scale, the latter are more than averagely prone to wicked ways and petty crime’.

It follows that no viable state can be built upon extremes of riches and poverty. Those who have a ‘superabundance of good fortune, strength, riches, friends, and so forth, neither wish to submit to rule nor understand how to do so’. Those who are greatly deficient in these qualities are ‘too subservient’. Aristotle is concerned with his definition of a citizen as one who is capable of ruling and of being ruled in turn. Those with excessive riches do not know how to be ruled in any way and will not accept being ruled; at the other extreme the poor not only ‘do not know how to rule, but only how to be ruled as a slave’. ‘The result is a state not of free men but of slaves and masters, the former full of envy, the latter of contempt. Nothing could be farther removed from friendship or from partnership in a state’. ‘The state aims to consist as far as possible of those who are like and equal, a condition found chiefly among the middle people... It is the middle citizens in a state who are the most secure: they neither covet, like the poor, the possessions of others, nor do others covet theirs as the poor covet those of the rich’. (Politics IV).

Aristotle’s case for moderation and a middling position implies an egalitarian social order beyond divisions of rich and poor.

20 ARISTOTLE LICENCE AND LIBERTY

Liberty they say when they mean licence, castigated Aristotle.

Where individuals ‘live intemperately, enjoying every licence and indulging in every luxury’ the inevitable result ‘is that esteem is given to wealth’ .. ‘a common state of affairs in military and warlike races’ (Bk 2)

“The final association, formed of several villages, is the state. For all practical purposes the process is now complete; self-sufficiency has been reached, and while the state came about as a means of securing life itself, it continues in being to secure the *good* life. Therefore every state exists by nature, as the earlier associations too were natural. This association is the end of those others, and

nature is itself an end; for whatever is the end-product of the coming into existence of any object, that is what we call its nature - of a man, for instance, or a horse or a household. Moreover the aim and the end is perfection; and self-sufficiency is both end and perfection."

"It follows that the state belongs to the class of objects which exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. Any one who by his nature and not simply by ill-luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman — he is like the war-mad man condemned in Homer's words as 'having no family, no law, no home'; for he who is such by nature is mad on war: he is a non-cooperator like an isolated piece in a game of draughts".

The individual who is a member of the *polis* is a co-operator. The individual without this public life is a 'non-cooperator'. I shall return to this theme of cooperation as integral to good political order later in relation to games theory.

Autarkeia means 'political and/or economic independence'. Aristotle uses the word in a more expansive sense, embracing opportunities to live the 'good' life according to the human virtues. Aristotle is a philosopher of the good life, of 'the human good'. (Kraut 1989).

Aristotle is concerned to properly define liberty so that it is distinguished from licence. In reconciling the freedom of each and all so as to enhance overall freedom, Aristotle rejects the two definitions of democracy - the 'sovereignty of the majority' and 'liberty' as 'doing what one wants' - as 'bad'. 'Just' is equated with what is equal, and the decision of the majority as to what is equal is regarded as sovereign; and liberty is seen in terms of doing what one wants. So in such a democracy each lives as he likes and for his 'fancy of the moment', as Euripides says'. Aristotle defends 'living according to the constitution' as 'self-preservation' or 'salvation' rather than, as it is for those who mistake liberty for licence, 'slavery' (P V.ix 1981:332; Politics trans Barker 1958:1310a). Aristotle follows Plato in identifying excessive personal liberty with license, claiming that such liberty ensures a large body of support for demagogues (1981:373/5).

Personal freedom as the freedom of the individual against the state - the 'negative' liberal conception - is not the peculiar product of the modern world. Aristotle explicitly acknowledges the existence of such a conception - 'to live as you like' - and argues against it: 'from it has come the ideal of 'not being ruled', not by anyone at all if possible, or at least only in alternation. This [to be ruled by alternation] is a contribution towards that liberty which is based on equality' (VI.ii 1981:362/3).

The same people who mistake licence for liberty will no doubt see this democratisation of decadence as an extension of freedom. It isn't. It is its narrowing of human potential, a constraining of human possibilities to the lowest rung of egoistic wants and desires. And it progressively eats away at its own basis. Such an economic and political system rests on fragile foundations.

The modern liberal equation of liberty with licence results from a 'failure properly to define liberty'. Aristotle's concept of the *polis* as 'expressing the needs of the individual on a high plane' (Edel 1982:319) leads him to a view of the *polis* as rationally constraining self-seeking individuals so as to secure the common good. Aristotle thus rejects democratic freedom as leading to the licence of individualism 'divorced from law and justice' (I.ii 1981:59/60). Aristotle's 'positive' conception of politics implies an associative framework which expands rather than inhibits individual freedom. Aristotle argues that 'there is a natural impulse towards this kind of association; and the first man to construct a state deserves credit for conferring very great benefits. For as man is the best of all animals when he has reached his full development, so he is worst of all when divorced from law and justice' (1.ii). Arguing that 'injustice armed is hardest to deal', Aristotle concludes that 'man without virtue is the most savage, the most unrighteous, and the worst in regard to sexual licence and gluttony'. Hence Alasdair MacIntyre's pessimism in *After Virtue*, a book title which defines the modern predicament. For MacIntyre, the modern world is a world without virtue, and hence given to licence. For Aristotle, ethics and politics are one and the same question implied by the social nature of human beings. 'The virtue of justice is a feature of a state; for justice is the arrangement of the political association, and a sense of justice decides what is just' (1.ii).

Aristotle argues for a functional conception of citizenship in the manner of Plato: 'we say a citizen is a member of an association, just as a sailor is; and each member of the crew has his different function and a name to fit it - rower, helmsman, look-out, and the rest. Clearly the most exact description of each individual will be a special description of his virtue; but equally there will also be a general description that will fit them all, because there is a task in which they all play a part - the safe conduct of the voyage; for each member of the crew aims at securing that. Similarly the task of all the citizens, however different they may be, is the stability of the association, that is, the constitution. Therefore the virtue of the citizen must be in relation to the constitution' (P 179).

One returns again to the conception of the democracy of function based on skill, talent and merit as against the democracy of opinion based on nothing more solid than subjective preference in the world of illusion.

21 ARISTOTLE'S FLOURISHING

The idea that there is a goal of life and that a human being can have a function is at the heart of most ancient ethical theories. The idea is that the best kind of life for human beings involves functioning properly. The task is to identify what this function is in the sense of the activity that people are suited to. The most famous exponent of this theory is Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The picture of the sane and healthy 'flourishing' personality comes from Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*, usually translated as happiness. Aristotle's ethical philosophy is called 'eudaimonistic', from the Greek word for 'happiness' - *eudaimonia* 'good' (*eu*) and god or spirit or demon (*daimon*). The term is broader and more dynamic than this, best captured by the idea of 'flourishing' or 'enjoying a good (successful, fortunate) life'.

Aristotle argues that happiness is like health in that it is a matter of correct functioning. The person who lives the kind of life for which human beings are most suited will be the happiest in fully realizing his or her potential.

This conception can be traced back to Plato and the ideal forms. Particular human beings are all approximations of the one ideal person. It is easy to see how this relates to the view that God made man in his own image. God here is the one ideal person, of which we are all approximations. Our task is to live up to that ideal. How we do that is answered by the theory of the virtues.

What is the Ultimate Goal of Life?

The question is presumptuous. Does life itself have a goal, ultimate or otherwise. What is happiness? Do human beings have a purpose? What is the meaning of life? Is life the sort of thing that has a meaning? Such questions are perennial; they have been asked for perhaps as long as human beings have been able to ask anything, and no doubt they will continue to be asked for just as long again. From the perspective of neo-Darwinian biology and biological explanation, it is less than certain that such questions even have a meaning. Other biological perspectives make it very clear that life is teleological. The work of Rupert Sheldrake, for instance, who writes of the 'new science of life', 'the greening of God and science' and the rebirth of God in science and nature. But Sheldrake is a maverick and an outsider in the world of biology.

Aristotle was himself a biologist, and he sought to develop a conception of happiness or flourishing in the fields of ethics and politics.

For Aristotle, there are two kinds of happiness: a social everyday one, for most people, and a better one, the contemplative life, for a select few.

Since the ability to reason is the distinguishing feature of human beings, Aristotle argues that a life devoted to reason therefore represents the pinnacle of human flourishing, and would therefore be the happiest life.

However, not everyone has the opportunity to spend their lives in philosophical contemplation. Since man is a '*zoon politikon*', a social animal, human beings can also find happiness through a practical life, lived out in society, in *politikon bion* or public life.

For Aristotle, being virtuous is rather like being healthy. Just as we should cultivate (for example) lower blood pressure, because it will tend to make us fitter

and less prone to certain diseases, so too should we cultivate (for example) generosity, because it will make us the sort of person who flourishes and is happy. Aristotle's philosophy is a 'virtue ethics', since it is concerned with cultivating a certain kind of character. And this conception is the response to Richard Dawkins' stand on the selfish character of biological nature. Dawkins repeatedly criticises morality in general and religion in particular as being 'made up'. Of course it is 'made up'. The virtues have to be cultivated for the very reasons that Dawkins gives – values of cooperation, generosity, equality, justice require a moral commitment that is independent of biological nature which is inherently selfish.

My own feeling is that a human society based simply on the gene's law of universal ruthless selfishness would be a very nasty society in which to live. But unfortunately, however much we may deplore something, it does not stop it being true. This book is mainly intended to be interesting, but if you would extract a moral from it, read it as a warning. Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to *teach* generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to.

Dawkins 2006 ch 1

Dawkins soon appreciated the inadequacy of his position. In the Introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of *The Selfish Gene* he clarifies his view:

I do with hindsight notice lapses of my own on the very same subject. These are to be found especially in Chapter 1, epitomised by the sentence 'Let us try to teach generosity and altruism because we are born selfish'. There is nothing wrong with teaching generosity and altruism, but 'born selfish' is misleading.

In place of 'the selfish gene', Dawkins suggests *The Immortal Gene*. *The Altruistic Vehicle* or *The Cooperative Gene*, expressing 'a form of cooperation among self-interested genes'. (Dawkins 2006).

Dawkins' correction here doesn't alter the basic point that, when it comes to building a society in which each cooperates for the common good, biological nature is of 'little help'.

Teaching virtuous behaviour is precisely what Aristotelian flourishing is all about. According to Aristotle, in line with other ancient Greek thinkers, being a good person and knowing right from wrong, is not primarily a matter of understanding and applying certain moral rules and principles. Rather, it is a question of being or becoming the kind of person who, by acquiring wisdom through proper practice and training, will come to habitually behave in appropriate ways in the appropriate circumstances. Having the right kind of character and the right dispositions, both natural and acquired, issues in the right kind of behaviour. The dispositions in question are virtues. The virtues are expressions or manifestations of *eudaimonia*, the highest good for human beings and the ultimate purpose of human activity.

It is worth pointing out here, given the influence of Aristotle's virtue ethics on Thomas Aquinas and the natural law tradition, that natural law does not denote what appears to be a natural response to a situation - natural in the sense that it reflects the nature that humankind shares in common with non-human animals. On the contrary, natural law is nature as seen through the eyes of reason. Put this way it is clearly related to Plato's 'eye of the mind'. But it also goes further, with the world seen as the purposeful creation of God.

For Aristotle and the Greeks, there are four cardinal virtues - courage, justice, temperance (self-mastery) and intelligence (practical wisdom). A pivotal doctrine for both Plato and Aristotle is the so-called 'unity of the virtues'. Observing that a good person must recognize how to respond sensitively to the sometimes conflicting demands of different virtues, Plato and Aristotle argue that the virtues are like different facets of a single jewel, so that it is not in fact possible to possess one virtue.

This conception came to have an enormous influence on medieval ethical thought. To the cardinal virtues were added the Christian virtues, faith, hope and charity, prudence, involving peacefulness, mercy, patience, and humility.

This practice and training in the virtues is an example of human beings flourishing as moral agents. This is a matter of ethical choice. I want to compare Aristotle's notion of flourishing with Spinoza's view of *conatus*, which seems to locate the functioning of human beings within a natural order.

22 SPINOZA – DEUS SIVE NATURA

Spinoza's account of the conative aspect of human beings is presented in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza argues that 'Each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours (*conatus*) to persevere in its being'. A *conatus* is a mode's essence (or degree of power) *once the mode has begun to exist*. Spinoza's theory of *conatus* is of universal application; all things, and not just human beings, manifest this endeavour. Our most fundamental desire, and indeed our essence, is the endeavour (*conatus*) or power to persist in existence. Thus *conatus* is the affirmation of essence in a mode's existence. Which begs the question of human choice and agency, of our place and our role in world. Spinoza seems to identify ethics, what it is to flourish, with power and function within the whole.

Spinoza argues that each thing endeavours to persevere in its being 'in so far as it is in itself'. This qualifying phrase is required; the phrase 'in itself' means 'independent'. By arguing that each thing endeavours to persevere in its being *in so far as it is independent*, Spinoza is meeting the potential objection that many human beings kill themselves out of sheer misery, or suffer torture and death for some cause or principle, or sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children. For Spinoza, such acts are not the acts of people who are independent. The interesting thing about this argument is that it completely inverts the reasoning of Socrates, who chose to face trial and execution on a point of principle. That moral act apart from biological necessity defines human independence for Socrates.

There is, however, no contradiction. Spinoza's argument places the emphasis on human beings as part of a self-subsistent whole called God/Nature. Human freedom can never be independent of that whole but is possible only in accordance with the proper functioning of the whole and the parts. Socrates' death thus indicates a malfunctioning of the whole system of which Socrates was a part, something which inhibits independence and freedom. The Athens which put Socrates to death was not

therefore a flourishing society, but a malfunctioning order whose errors brought a premature end to the flourishing life of its most famous citizen, Socrates. The end of Socrates' philosophising was to encourage others to use their rational faculties and hence together realise the flourishing society. In Spinoza's terms this would result in the proper functioning of the whole and the parts in harmony.

Spinoza refers to the fact that each particular thing is a mode which expresses in a certain way the power of God, i.e. of substance. This means that a particular thing's endeavour to persevere in its being does not spring from itself alone; rather, its endeavour is derived from God, the only being which is 'in itself.

'The more man is guided by reason, the more he is free' said Spinoza, but freedom here is the rational appreciation of necessity, the intellectual love of God/Nature.

'Know thyself!' read the inscription at the Oracle of Delphi. But Spinoza's notion of power raises questions of knowledge as self-knowledge. But what of creation as self-creation? What if this God/Nature is a human artefact, the product of reason and labour? Think back to Plato and his notion of innate concepts.

Plato's world of Being and Spinoza's God/Nature could be defined in terms of 'ultimate reality'. I want to examine the extent to which this world is not some external, objective datum to be appreciated intellectually but is itself in some way a human creation infused with human subjectivity.

The American physicist Frank Tipler makes this suggestion: 'People talk of God as the creator of life. But maybe the purpose of life is to create God.'

This is the terrain of theology. Tipler, however, argues that the stated aim of physics is to describe the Universe in its entirety. And perhaps we can discern some such notion in the work of Teilhard of Chardin and his idea of the noosphere, an intellectual film surrounding the world. This noosphere functions as some kind of Universal Mind in which we may all participate, integrating the technosphere, the world of means, and the biosphere, the nurturing, sustaining basis of life on earth.

Teilhard writes: 'Every person, in the course of his life, must build—starting with the natural territory of his own self—a work, an opus, into which something enters from all the elements of the earth. He makes his own soul throughout all his earthly days; and at the same time he collaborates in another work, in another opus, which infinitely transcends, while at the same time it narrowly determines, the perspectives of his individual achievement: the completing of the world' (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*).

Tipler is explicit that physics, in attempting to explain everything in the world, is concerned with the search for a Supreme Being.

'If it is to succeed in this task, clearly it [physics] must also describe any Supreme Being living in the Universe. It therefore follows that theology must eventually be shown to be a branch of physics.'

Nietzsche argued that the death of God gave human beings, the deicides, the responsibility for becoming as gods and living as gods. Nietzsche was well aware of how onerous a task this was likely to prove. Remember also Bronowski's words on the Nazi death camps – 'this is what happens when men aspire to the knowledge of gods'. Science, Bronowski points out, is a very human form of knowledge. Scientists work at the frontiers of the known and are aware that every scientific judgment stands on the edge of error. That doesn't sound like an all-knowing, all-powerful Supreme Being at all, merely a sober, down-to-earth attempt to find out what can be known. 'Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible.' The problems come when that fallibility is ignored, when human beings come to be so impressed by what they can and do know that they forget what they do not know. It is no great step from believing that we have knowledge of God as the Supreme Being to believing that such knowledge makes us gods.

Science is not a god, and the better scientists do not aspire to the knowledge of gods. But maybe Tipler has a point with respect to the theological notion of Creation as a co-evolution, something that God and the human species engage in as a joint venture. Which begs the question of how life, of which we are a part, could create this Supreme Being?

I want to look at philosophers who see the world around us, the human world, as a human creation.

23 SPECTATOR UNDER ETERNITY

One of the most interesting passages in philosophy comes from Plato discussing the ideal world of forms: ‘how can he who has magnificence of mind and is the spectator of all time and all existence, think much of human life?’

Such a philosopher possesses a naturally harmonious mind. Order, regularity, purpose, number – harmony. We are back to Pythagoras and the ‘music of the spheres’. In describing J.S. Bach as ‘universal’, Kenneth Clark quotes a great music critic, who said of Bach: ‘He is the spectator of all musical time and existence, to whom it is not of the smallest importance whether a thing be new or old, so long as it is true.’ (Clarke 1969: 226/7).

The seemingly poetic passage from Plato is packed with all manner of philosophical complexities with respect to the universal, the eternal, to all time and existence. Who can this spectator be? Where can this spectator be? Outside time and existence or inside? Subject or object? A subject would be inside the world as participator-creator. The spectator of all time and existence implies the intellectual appreciation of reality as the one single substance.

The notion of spectator as intellectual appreciation of all time and existence suggests something of Spinoza’s freedom as the rational or intellectual appreciation of reality as one single substance - *Deus sive Natura* – God and Nature as interchangeable and all life united as one within the one single substance. This is what Spinoza calls *amor intellectualis Dei* – the intellectual love of God/Nature. Except that there is no ‘outside’ in Spinoza’s God/Nature, no external vantage point from where observation may be undertaken. Any spectatating in Spinoza is also a participating, a functioning within a self-contained whole.

Despite Spinoza's determined geometric efforts, his metaphysical system exhibits many profoundly poetic features. Like Plato's spectator of all time and existence, Spinoza's words have a poetic ring, but are not poetry at all; they are pure logic concerning knowledge. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that the aim of the wise should be to rise above the illusory perspective to achieve the 'absolute viewpoint':

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that 'It is of the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity'. Spinoza explains that to talk about eternity is to talk about the existence that follows from the nature or definition of God/Nature, not as 'everlasting existence' but as timeless, like relations between mathematical figures. This means that 'it is of the nature of reason' to rise above the illusory perspective which sees things 'under the aspect of time' (*sub specie durationis*) to achieve that 'absolute viewpoint' which sees the universe as God sees it, 'under the aspect of eternity' (*sub specie aeternitatis*).

Spinoza's ideas have a deep resonance, all the more so in that they appeal to both the scientific and the religious mind.

Plato claimed that 'philosophy begins in wonder.' Compare this to Spinoza's view: 'Wonder is the thought of any thing on which the mind stays fixed because this particular thought has no connection with any others.' It is not difficult to picture Spinoza in wondrous contemplation of God/Nature. Spinoza's conception of love as 'pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause' is in accord with the conception of *amor intellectualis dei* (the intellectual love of God). The intellectual love of God necessarily includes an element of self-love – since God and all Nature are one and the same thing. And since this element of self-love doesn't have an external cause, it follows that the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself.

Spinoza's strength of mind is quite distinct from the Stoic exercise of will in being the intellectual recognition of facts without sentiment, without the intrusion of subjective fears and hopes, impassively; it is the intellectual virtue of attaining acquiescence, objectivity, in face of rationally ascertained truth. This is to achieve eternal life through the intellectual love of God or Nature: 'he who understands himself and his emotions loves God, and the more so the more he understands himself and his emotions' (E 5, 15). Arising necessarily from the pursuit of knowledge, this

delineates an intellectual love (*amor intellectualis Dei*) through activity of mind. Such a mind rejoices constantly in the object of its contemplation. God is without emotion and can experience neither passion nor pleasure nor pain (E 5, 17). God neither loves the good nor hates the wicked (C XXIII): indeed God loves and hates no one (E 5, 17, Corollary). Hence 'he who loves God cannot endeavour to bring it about that God should love him in return' (E 5, 19). The intellectual love of God or Nature is wholly disinterested, and 'cannot be polluted by an emotion either of envy or jealousy, but is cherished the more, the more we imagine men to be bound to God by this bond of love' (E 5, 20). Indeed, the intellectual love of God 'is the very love of God with which God loves himself' (E 5, 36). Through this love of God, human beings participate in the impersonal, universal love that reigns in the divine intellect: for God loves human beings as a self-love in and through men and this eternal love constitutes our 'salvation, blessedness or liberty'.

Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God' is the highest form of philosophic wisdom.

Whilst the 'intellectual love of God' implies a purely spiritual, other-worldly contemplation quite detached from the material world, there is a need to remember that by God Spinoza also means 'Nature'. To gain the fuller sense of Spinoza's meaning, one needs also to write the phrase as the 'intellectual love of Nature'. Since God or Nature is a single substance, understanding any particular part of it is necessarily to understand more of the whole. It follows that in the process of coming to understand themselves and the causes of their states and reactions, human beings necessarily come to understand more of Nature as a whole. Spinoza has been described as a mystical pantheist of account of equating God or Nature and his description of the good life as 'the intellectual love of God'. In truth, Spinoza's conclusions are rigorously deduced from logical and metaphysical premises. Whatever poets and mystics may read into it, Spinoza's 'Intellectual love of God' possesses a precise meaning which Spinoza concisely explains in Proposition XXIV of Part V of the *Ethics*. Or are logic, reason and mathematics the high road to mystical oneness?

The more we understand individual things, the more we understand God. To understand God is to understand Nature as self-creating and self-created. The third

and highest level of intuitive knowledge reveals every individual detail of the natural world to be related to the whole structure of Nature. It follows from this that human beings, in coming to develop an intellectual love of God, become philosophical naturalists in gaining pleasure through tracing in detail the order of natural causes.

Only with the intellectual love of God/Nature will human beings be truly free. Thus the basis of Spinoza's ethics is an objective, 'selfless' view of the world.

Spinoza was building on the philosophy of Descartes, who had founded knowledge upon the certainty of the thinking subject, the 'I' of 'I am thinking, therefore I am' (*Cogito ergo sum*). Thinking and being go together in an active functioning. For Spinoza, this functioning pertains to a self-subsistent whole, of which human beings are a part. Spinoza argues that Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas' represent the world not from the point of view of the subject, the *cogito*, but from the 'point of view' of God 'under the species of eternity' (*sub specie aeternitatis*).

Spinoza identified 'God or Nature' as the unique infinite substance.

First he takes the thought of substance: 'So if someone says that he has a clear and distinct - that is to say, true - idea of substance and that he nevertheless doubts if such a substance exists, this would be just the same as if he said that he has a true idea but nevertheless suspects it may be false.' From this it follows: 'Since existence appertains to the nature of substance, its definition must of necessity involve existence, and therefore from its mere definition its existence can be concluded.'

Every human body is part of the one body of God/Nature, thus in harming others, we harm ourselves. The happiness of each of us depends on the happiness of all. The universe cannot be explained by reference to anything else - even God, because it is God. The universe is thus without meaning, yet at the same time is its own meaning.

The task of philosophy is to achieve 'adequate' knowledge by ascending from the point of view of the subject, from Descartes' *cogito*, to the 'absolute conception' of the world, i.e. to the conception of the world from no point of view within it. Thus, adequate knowledge consists in the elimination of the subject from the description of what is known. Spinoza sees life from the point of view, not of the subject, an 'I', whose

problems arise from his individual circumstances, but of a pure and disinterested reasoner, for whom the human individual is nothing but a mode of God/Nature, governed by the laws which govern everything.

Is this Plato's spectator? Not really. The disinterested reasoner is not outside of the universe. There can be no outside in Spinoza's single divine/natural substance. The human individual is a mode of God/Nature, governed by the laws which govern everything. The idea is remarkably similar to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, nature as a self-regulating organism of which we ourselves are a part.

As an arch rationalist, Spinoza always strives to perceive things *sub specie aeternitatis*—'under an aspect of eternity.' Human beings are part of a greater whole and find their meaning in their healthy functioning within that whole. From this perspective, the self and its particular concerns would be dwarfed by the power of Nature as a whole. This conception seems to define freedom as the appreciation of necessity, the rational understanding of natural laws which embrace us as part of the natural world. But in a certain sense, Spinoza's philosophy is beyond the controversy of freedom and/or necessity. Proper functioning is proper functioning. It is all about joy and *conatus*.

Which begs the question of our role and our place within the whole. Is there such a thing as creative human agency or do we merely identify with natural laws of the single substance God/Nature? Does our rational appreciation of God/Nature make us spectators or participators? For Spinoza, reason enables us to ascend to the absolute conception of what seems to be a given divine/natural harmony. From being passive parts of the one substance we become active elements. But the activity of reason seems to be limited to the appreciation of the laws of the one substance God/Nature. Our activity is part of the proper functioning of the whole.

Are we really spectators or do we have a role in bringing this harmony about? What about being participators? Is our rational appreciation ascending to the absolute conception our only activity? Is this active appreciation creative in itself or merely reflective of a given order?

So much mediaeval sophistry? Those who think so should note that such ideas are an increasingly influential part of modern thinking. Contemporary scientists have proposed a similar argument to account for several central notions, including the existence of the Big Bang and the elusive Theory of Everything (or unified theory). In contrast, scientists still clinging to the mechanistic conception of the world are looking increasingly old-hat.

No less a figure than Stephen Hawking asked: 'Is the unified theory so compelling that it brings about its own existence?' Such argument implies the conclusion that the universe must be the way it is, and had to be created, because no other universe (or lack of one) was possible. The metaphysics of this argument would certainly be understood by Spinoza, as well as Leibniz. As a supreme metaphysical idea, Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* belongs in the Big Bang class. The Euclidian mathematics which proved the argument may have been eclipsed, but the compelling beauty and logic of a single substance governing itself by immanent laws remain unsurpassed.

What Stephen Hawking refers to as 'the mind of God' is similar to Spinoza's idea of a pure and disinterested reasoner. Here is Hawking's conclusion to *A Brief History of Time*:

'If we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God.'

We return again to the American physicist Frank Tipler and his suggestion: 'People talk of God as the creator of life. But maybe the purpose of life is to create God.'

This is not just human beings creating God but all of life, of which the human species is a part.

Such a notion sets human functioning, what Aristotle called flourishing, within the ecosystem as a whole, respecting planetary boundaries and natural limits rather than seeing nature as dead matter to exploit.

It is in face of the looming environmental crisis that this functioning as flourishing forms such an appropriate ethic for our times. By seeing ourselves as apart from Nature, we have acted in an exploitative way, paying no heed to the consequences of our actions upon the natural organism of which we are a part. In exploiting nature this way we are making the planet progressively less habitable. The sixth great extinction spasm of geological time is now underway, grace of humankind. EO Wilson calls this 'the death of life'. The new Earth created by human technics has acquired a force that can break the crucible of biodiversity, unravelling the fabric of life. We need to worship technical means less and come to pay more attention to ends, seeing ourselves as part of a greater whole.

In other words, one needs some conception of human good, of human flourishing in a form (or range of forms) of communal life that enhances rather than inhibits the human ontology. And this conception can only be developed by seeing the human species as part of the greater substance of the living earth.

Reinterpreted as an ecologically inspired attitude, functioning/flourishing values the immeasurable sources of joy available through the appreciation of the richness and diversity of life. It combines Spinoza's sense of joy with Aristotle's happiness.

The flourishing community is therefore simple in means but rich in ends, valuing the qualities of all life forms over the quantities of things.

Which still begs the question of creative human agency. How creative is functioning as flourishing?

Theoretical physics advances the idea of the participatory universe, in which everything is the observer and everything is the observed. Think back to Plato's

innate concepts and imagine these as actively shaping the world. Kant took this reasoning further.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant was to argue decisively that this purging of all reference to the subject is neither possible nor desirable: the world is *my* world and *your* world, it is *our* world, created by conceptual capacities innate to the human mind and therefore stamped indelibly with the mark of self-awareness.

This is the point about Plato's ideal Forms, the notion that concepts are innate and enable human beings to organise the world around them, to classify experience. Experience does not create the concepts, the concepts organise and order experience.

From this perspective, our intellectual appreciation of God/Nature is an understanding of something that is already in part a human artefact, shot through which human consciousness and purpose and design. We are a part of everything we see, we constitute through our cognitive abilities everything we see. We are moving now onto a terrain occupied by philosophers like Vico, Kant, Hegel and Marx. But before these, we need to answer the question of how we know? Could it be that the world we see is nothing but an illusion?

24 DESCARTES AND THE BRAIN IN THE VAT

To really know something means that you cannot possibly be mistaken. But so often we think we know something and it turns out we were mistaken. Given such experiences, how can we ever be sure that we know anything? Calling into question our ability to know anything at all is the attitude of a sceptic.

One Greek philosopher is supposed to have said something like: 'We cannot know the truth. Even if we could know it, we couldn't communicate it. And even if we could communicate it, we wouldn't be understood' - which is about as sceptical as one can get. What remains of civilised life given the impossibility of knowledge, communication and understanding. There remains no basis for human interaction and exchange, beyond animal functions.

But such a sceptic has cut the grounds from under his own argument. To state that 'we cannot know the truth' is itself a truth claim. We can therefore know the truth that we cannot know the truth. The claim that knowledge is impossible either constitutes a piece of knowledge or it does not. If it does, then knowledge must be possible after all, in which case my original claim was false. If it does not, then I have no business making the assertion; neither I nor anyone else has any reason to believe it.

Scepticism does not have to be so extreme. A more moderate sceptical position does not deny that knowledge may be possible, or even that some of our beliefs may in fact be true. It merely holds that we cannot be *sure* that any of our beliefs are true. There are ways we can make sure.

By far the most famous attempt in the history of philosophy to tackle this problem, to refute scepticism by showing that we can be absolutely certain about some things, was made by the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650).

Rene Descartes set the agenda for modern philosophy by placing the question 'Of what can I be certain?' centre stage. He used the method of systematic doubt, by which he would only accept what he could see clearly and distinctly to be true. He knew that his senses could be deceived, therefore he would not trust them; neither could he always trust his own logic. The one thing Descartes could not doubt was his own existence. If he doubted, he was there to doubt; therefore he must exist. This is the one truth that cannot be doubted. After all, if I did not exist, I could not doubt or even be deceived about anything. Descartes expresses this insight in one of the most famous propositions in the history of philosophy: 'I think, therefore I am' (*cogito ergo sum*). This, he claims, is an indubitable certainty that can serve as a foundation upon which he can build the rest of his philosophical system and thereby lay to rest the spectre of scepticism.

There is a question as to what the first certainty is. Is it 'I think', or is it 'I exist'? Descartes seems to say it is the latter. Yet if we take the statement 'I think, therefore I am' at face value, he seems to be inferring his existence from the fact that he is thinking, which implies that 'I think' is actually his first certainty.

But what of 'I am, therefore I think'? Martin Heidegger restored the priority of being. Which begs the question of how do we know we are?

Thinking and being go together in a way that is still debated today in the realms of consciousness, mind and neuroscience.

I would just add here that it is more appropriate to translate *cogito* as 'thinking' rather than as 'think', to denote the activity of thought rather than the mere, possibly unused, capacity for thought. It is only in the act of thinking that I know that I am. I think.

Unlike Plato, Descartes does not deny that we can have knowledge of the objects of sense experience. But we only gain that knowledge through the use of reason; it is reason which justifies our beliefs about the world.

The essential thing to grasp is that sense data are not simply 'things'. They depend upon our senses and relationships, as well as on that which is being described.

'Imagine that a human being has been subjected to an operation by an evil scientist. The person's brain has been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings have been connected to a super-scientific computer which causes the person to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. There seem to be people, objects, the sky, etc.; but really all the person is experiencing is the result of electronic impulses travelling from the computer to the nerve endings.'

This may appear to be a futuristic nightmare, a work of science-fiction, but it relates to very real issues concerning the human mind and body, to the key questions of human dignity, freedom and identity in the day to day world in which we all live. Are we who we think we are? The disturbing question is that if the brain of each human being is located in a vat rather than in a skull, would it make any difference? Our experiences, feelings and emotions would be exactly the same as if we were living within a real body in a real world. But it begs the question of just what is 'real'. The next section will address the claims made by neurodeterminists and reductionists like Crick and Blackmore that human beings are nothing but their neural networks and that the freedom they believe they have is a mere illusion. Human beings are no more than neurons project these illusions on

the inanimate world which they mistake for a 'real' world. It seems that to a strong section of opinion in neuroscience, human beings are little more than brains in a vat. And not autonomous brains either, just physical and chemical processes churning out illusions. The 'real' world one experiences – the pen you write with, the chair you sit on and table you lean on, the book you write in, the fingers you write with – these are all part of one not so grand illusion, the thoughts and sensations fed into your disembodied brain. Except that for neuroscientists, the brain is not disembodied but embedded in a series of neural networks that make the human being a prisoner of their neural connections.

Of course, since the illusory world is the only world that people know, people act as though that world is indeed a true reality. Individuals who do act as though they believe that they are merely brains floating in a vat are likely to be regarded with suspicion and fear by others in society. Individuals do not, in the main, act as though they are brains in a vat. That in itself does not constitute evidence against our existence as envatted brains, but could all be part of the illusion. It wouldn't feel right to act as though we are envatted brains; right feeling is part of the illusion that we are free, choosing beings with minds and bodies of our own.

It would be difficult to find one philosopher who believes that people are indeed brains in vats. But that is to be expected if people are fully part of the illusion – that is, they are unable to perceive the reality. That would apply to philosophers as much as to the rest of the human species. It is, however, easy to find scientists in the mechanistic and materialist tradition who come close to asserting some such notion. Francis Crick is not far at all from this notion of envatted brains when he asserts that 'you're nothing but a pack of neurons'. The question is begged: just how certain anyone can be that they are not a brain in a vat? If Crick claims we are nothing but a pack of neurons, the question is begged, how does he know? How has he escaped the general neurodeterminism and seen through the world of illusion? If he can do it, so can the rest of us. In which case we are more than our neural networks and have the capacity for independent thought, i.e thought that is more than a projection of illusions.

As ridiculous as it may seem, a great deal hangs on the answer to this question. If the possibility that human beings are merely brains in a vat cannot be ruled out, this means that all the things that we think we know about the world could well be false. Our truth could be no more than illusion, no matter how passionately we hold it and no matter the intensity with which we feel it. And this possibility alone – not even its certainty – means that we don't really know anything at all. The mere possibility is enough to undermine human claims to knowledge about themselves and the external world.

So is there any escape from the vat?

The brain-in-a-vat story comes from American philosopher Hilary Putnam's book *Reason, Truth, and History*. Although Putnam's book was published in 1981, the problem is not new. Asking whether there is an escape from the vat is no different to asking whether the prisoners can escape from Plato's cave of illusion. But it is a problem that has been given added impetus by the claims made by contemporary neuro-reductionists and determinists to the effect that human beings are nothing but their neural networks projecting illusions upon the inanimate material world. I will come to this problem in the next section. For now, I want to return to Rene Descartes.

Putnam's brain in a vat is a modern version of the evil demon in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641). In this work, Descartes sought to establish the certain foundations on which to build the edifice of human knowledge. He employed the 'method of doubt' to identify and discard any beliefs susceptible to the slightest degree of uncertainty. The senses are unreliable and dreams are confusing. Then there is the evil demon:

'I shall suppose . . . that some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment.'

Surveying the wreckage of beliefs and opinions which proved unable to withstand the method of doubt, Descartes came to the one thing that could not be doubted. *Cogito ergo sum* – ‘I am thinking, therefore I am’. It is on this certain foundation that Descartes set about reconstructing the edifice of human knowledge.

Descartes’ achievement made him the founder of modern philosophy for many people and, indeed, the Western world has been built on Cartesian foundations. However, there are many people who think that Descartes had greater success in stating the problem than he had in solving it. Descartes set the problem so well that he struggles to extricate himself from it. The mere fact that ‘I am thinking’ says nothing about the quality of thought that results. To think denotes the capacity to see through illusion. But it also indicates a capacity to continue to see only illusion and mistake it for reality. The prisoners in Plato’s cave are convinced that the shadows they see on the wall are the true reality. Thinking alone is not enough. Descartes, of course, sought a way of identifying ‘clear and distinct ideas’ as distinct from illusions. Fine. But the *cogito* in itself is not the certain base for this project that Descartes thought it was. How can we have ‘clear and distinct’ ideas on the shaky foundations of mere thinking? Thinking what?

Putnam is no more successful than Descartes. Relying on his own causal theory of meaning, Putnam sets out to demonstrate that the brain-in-a-vat scenario is incoherent. All that he achieves, however, is the semantic triumph that a brain in a vat could not express the thought that it was a brain in a vat. All that this proves is that the condition of being a brain-in-a-vat is invisible and incapable of being described from within. But this does not establish the foundations for knowledge.

Ideas like the envatted brain and Plato’s cave are thought-provoking and are designed to encourage people to question the nature of reality and evaluate their relations to and knowledge of that reality. In the 1999 film *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves plays the role of the computer hacker Neo who discovers that the ‘real world’ is actually a virtual simulation created by an updated version of Descartes’ malign demon, a cyber-intelligence. Human beings are all kept within fluid-filled pods, wired up to a vast computer. All the principal features of the envatted brain are present. It is

also worth comparing this scenario to the arguments made by neuro-scientists of a reductionist and determinist persuasion. ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons’ asserted Francis Crick, arguing that human beings are not free, choosing, rational beings but are led by their neurons to project illusions upon the world around them.

The issue of neuro-determinism will be addressed later. What is interesting to explore here is the extent to which the brain-in-the-vat scenario is an argument for scepticism. The popularity of the film *The Matrix* is considered evidence of a popular susceptibility to sceptical arguments. But remember that Descartes’ purpose was to *defeat* scepticism and establish the certain foundations of knowledge. And remember that Plato’s attempt to penetrate illusion in the cave was part of a project to get human beings, as prisoners of illusion, *to see the true reality beyond the illusion presented by the senses*. In other words, scepticism with regard to illusion is only the beginning of the process by which human beings lose their captive status and come to apprehend the real world, it is not the end of the process, encouraging us to accept our status as passive, ignorant, contented beings ruled by illusion. The brain-in-the-vat also offers a picture of a real world – the fact that human beings are not flesh and blood creatures but really just envatted brains. *The Matrix* also gives us a real world, human beings within fluid filled pods and wired up to a computer. Whereas Plato and Descartes offered an attractive reality beyond the illusory senses, these nightmare scenarios make the illusion more attractive than the grim reality.

People living in what they, in their illusion, call the ‘real world’ will no doubt prefer their common sense and ignorant contentment to the sceptic’s nightmarish vision, just as they refuse the philosopher’s enlightened vision of the true, the good and the beautiful. The question is, however, who can be sure where the balance of truth and falsehood lies? The philosopher Nick Bostrom considers it highly probable that people are *already* living in a computer simulation! Bostrom’s scenario is this. At the current rate of scientific advance, it is likely that civilization will attain a technological level which makes it possible to create incredibly sophisticated computer simulations of human minds and of worlds for those minds to inhabit. Such simulated worlds will require little by way of resources. Since a single laptop computer could house thousands or even millions of simulated minds, it is highly probable that simulated minds will come to outnumber biological ones by a substantial margin. With

it being impossible to distinguish between experiences, neither biological (the minority) nor simulated minds (the overwhelming majority) will think that they are simulated. The question is how is it possible to tell the simulated minds that they are mistaken about their true nature and are in fact simulated? The argument is naturally presented in terms of an hypothetical future, but of course, if it is possible, who can say this 'future' doesn't describe the current reality? In other words, if computer expertise makes this simulated world of simulated minds possible, then it could already have happened, with minds already having been simulated. In heeding the warning of a future possibility could we not be beginning to perceive what is already our true condition? We don't feel like simulations, but this is no reason that we are not. The fact that no-one believes that we are computer-simulated minds living in a computer-simulated world could testify to quality of the programming. If the logic of Bostrom's argument is correct, then it could well be that our supposition is wrong!

The intriguing, indeed worrying, thing about this argument is that it could easily apply to what many neuro-scientists are revealing about the way human behaviour is controlled by neural networks. Or, more to the point, the way that human behaviour could come to be controlled by the manipulation of neural networks. Many scientists believe it is possible to engineer happiness and are increasingly seeking a path of government. Here is an example of knowledge, partial knowledge, being used to manipulate reality and engineer the cave of shadows on the basis of scientific knowledge. The political dangers of this were adumbrated in the section on Plato, Plato's puppeteers as a political elite, and will be addressed further in the next section.

So what is scepticism? The designation 'sceptic' applies to those who have a tendency to doubt ideas or beliefs. In this simple sense, scepticism denotes a healthy and open-minded willingness to subject viewpoints and values to testing. Respecting empirical, rational and logical controls, such a state of mind is a valuable safeguard against credulity in politics and elsewhere and can validate the foundations of knowledge. Without those controls, however, the tendency to 'doubt everything' – Marx's favourite quote from the Roman poet Terence – becomes a plain denial of the possibility of knowledge, irrespective of the justification for doing so. A properly philosophical usage concerns this justification.

From the perspective of philosophy, scepticism doesn't involve the claim that we know nothing. Such a view is obviously self-contradictory since if it is true that we know nothing, then it would be impossible to know that we know nothing. Socrates was a sceptic in the philosophical sense of seeking out truth, knowledge and wisdom. 'Only this that I know, that I know nothing' declared Socrates. True wisdom lies in the knowledge that one doesn't know, but can find out by appropriate questioning. Philosophy involves the framing of the right questions. Socrates was wise because he *knew* that he knew nothing and on the basis of that ignorance sought to find out the truth by questioning. This contrasts with those who mistakenly think that they have knowledge, those who don't know that they don't know and so lack the inclination to find out the truth. Know-all's who mistakenly think that they know it all. The role of the sceptic from the philosophical perspective is to test the claims to knowledge. Human beings make claims to know many things and, indeed, think that they know these things. But how can these claims be defended? A specific claim to knowledge needs to be supported by adequate grounds that justify the claim. Human knowledge of the external world is based on perceptions gained via our senses, mediated by our use of reason. But the senses can mislead and reason could merely be illusion. Perception could therefore be laden with error. If we cannot distinguish the dreaming experience from the waking experience, then we can never quite be certain that something we think to be real is in fact real. We can believe something to be true but this is very different from knowing that it is in fact true. Taken to the limits, such doubt leads us to brains in vats, or a neural determinism projecting illusion, with no possibility of escape.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge: determining what is known, what can be known and how it is known. This involves establishing the required conditions for something to be considered knowledge. Epistemology is therefore an organised and systematic attempt to meet the challenge of scepticism. How successful epistemology has been in defeating scepticism depends upon the extent to which one applies empirical, rational and logical controls. Taken to extremes, there may be no escape from the vat, with Plato's cave continuing to cast a giant shadow over the emancipatory claims of philosophy. But if scepticism really has triumphed in this sense, why does the question continue to be debated, why are people not content with their illusory experience and why are sceptics themselves so certain

that the real doesn't exist, defending the illusory with a certainty that indicates the possibility of some form of knowledge? Why do some human beings keep questioning rather than acquiesce in ignorant contentment?

25 NEURAL DETERMINISM, MORAL CHOICE AND SOCIAL EPIGENETICS

The idea that mental powers and moral senses play a creative role in evolution is something that neo-Darwinian scientists are nervous of, if not downright hostile. Such scientists seem to take an inordinate pleasure in driving 'purpose' out of life, suppressing meaning and replacing it with blind mechanical chance and necessity, and then expecting human beings, meaning seeking creatures, to be somehow impressed.

In January 2009 the British Humanist Association paid for an advertisement carried on the side of London buses which read, 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.' The most bizarre thing about this campaign of Richard Dawkins' inspired militant and aggressive atheism is that in place of a God which delivers meaning and hope, the neo-Darwinian biologists are offering nothing but a bleak, purposeless, blind, mechanical universe. There is no meaning and nothing matters, 'now stop worrying and enjoy yourselves'.

The assertion is crass and is based on an obvious *non sequitur*. There is even evidence from evolutionary biology that a religious belief and faith is integral to a long, happy and fulfilled life, investing a meaningless physical existence with a moral and emotional meaning, giving purpose to human life, a sense of the future that transcends the immediacy of the sensory world which can overwhelm human beings. This is no surprise to those of faith. To them, faith is not about worrying at all but, 'rejoicing in all the good the Lord your God has given you' (Deuteronomy 26:11). We could translate this into Spinoza's sense of joy as the proper functioning within the single divine/natural substance.

Whether one wishes to call it God or Nature, the physical equipment that science *explains* is cause for celebration, gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving. To put the point bluntly, it's not what you have, it's what you do with it; it's not where you take things from, it's where you take them to. And to people of faith, religion is an essential part

of the pursuit of happiness. Research indicates that individuals who have religious faith and regularly attend religious services have higher life satisfaction, live longer, have more successful marriages and have more children. In evolutionary terms, people of faith are life's winners.

But at least the British Humanist Association advertisement raises the greatest of all existential questions: How shall we live our lives? This is not a question that science can answer at all, although it can certainly inform it.

Science cannot pronounce on morals. Being on the wrong side of the fact/value divide, science cannot deliver meaning. An ought-to-be cannot be derived from an is. This is clear and commonplace stuff. As Bertrand Russell put it: 'Science, by itself, cannot supply us with an ethic. It can show us how to achieve a given end, and it may show us that some ends cannot be achieved. But among ends that can be achieved our choice must be decided by other than purely scientific considerations.' (Russell 1950 Gardner (ed.) 1984: 406-7.)

There is a phrase that what one cannot have, one must destroy. Science cannot deliver meaning, and so it sets about reducing all those human activities which are meaningful to scientific explanation. It squeezes the meaning out of ideas – secretions of the brain, apparently – art, literature, creativity, as though a physical explanation of any of these things amounts to the whole story.

Darwin is the basis for this crude materialism, but he was not so stupid and so shallow as to deny the importance of human rationality, whether one expresses this as intelligence, language-use, or any of the other mental powers which together constitute culture. Darwin did indeed describe thought as nothing but 'a secretion of the brain'. This implies that if the development of the brain can be accounted for by the principles of natural selection, then there is no left-over problem concerning thought.

That's OK as far as it goes, it just that it doesn't go very far. What is left over, of course, is the specific character and quality of human thought, the question of truth and falsehood, the fact that good ideas and effective reasoning lead to human flourishing, and bad ideas and poor reasoning issue in disaster. The reductive 'nothing but' of science is plainly inadequate here.

Darwin was concerned to deny the idea that there is something unique about the intellectual capacities of human beings. 'There is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.' The intellectual capacities of human beings and other animals are produced by natural selection, so that their respective capacities are not different in kind, only in degree.

There has been a tendency to read this as delivering a blow to the religious claims of human uniqueness, the idea that 'God made man in his own image'. The concern to press the force of this point home has resulted in the neglect of Darwin's more profound points. In the first place, Darwin was more concerned to revalue the richness of the mental lives of non-human animals than he was to devalue the mental lives of human beings. In this, Darwin corrects the prejudice that whereas human beings are mentally complex, 'mere animals' are lacking in intellectual capacities of any creativity and sophistication. The evidence is clear - non-human animals experience pleasure and pain, terror, suspicion, and fear, envy, pride and justice, even those very spurs of philosophy, awe, wonder and curiosity. In fine, mentally and emotionally, human and non-human animals are the same in kind. At a time of climate crisis, destruction of animal habitats for profit and a mass extinction not seen for 65 million years, this point is worth emphasising.

But this ecological message reinforces the quality of ideas and emphasises that in some way the human species *is* special. Ideas matter. So it is essential not to misunderstand Darwin on this point. Darwin did not deny the importance of human intellectual capacities and did not deny the creative power of human thought, reason and linguistic ability. The differences between human and non-human animals are great but are matters of degree rather than of kind. The conclusion is that those who wish to emphasise human special-ness are still free to explore the mental power and moral sense of human beings as having a creative role in human evolution. The point is that Charles Darwin argued that, above and beyond biology, it is the 'mental powers' and 'moral sense' of humanity that really makes the difference in evolution.

Darwin understood that an exclusive focus on physical laws and development is insufficient to account for human evolution. Since ancient times, human beings have been considered unique on account of a higher intellectual capacity. *Homo sapiens* means rational man. 'Man' may be an animal but he is the rational animal. It may be

a difference of degree from non-human animals rather than a difference in kind, but it is a difference all the same, and full of creative moral and intellectual power, a non-tangible technology that has created and powered civilisation. Any plausible account of humanity and human development must recognise and assimilate this, the most important of human qualities, above and beyond explanation of physical processes.

Which brings us back to science and the tendency of those concerned only with physical explanation to argue or at least imply that the very things which make human beings unique – ideas, thought, reason – are illusions, ‘nothing but’ the product of biochemical and physical processes. That claim needs to be exposed for the crude scientism it is. There is a current mania for the wildly overrating the findings of contemporary neuroscience and neuro-biology, as though explanation of physiological processes behind human behaviour constitutes the whole of human life, thought and culture. This implies that the products of human thought and action *reduce to* physiological processes, which is to get the relation completely the wrong way round. Culture is what human beings do with their physiological and chemical equipment, it is the added value, what may be called ‘biology plus’. And it is the ‘plus’ that counts and which makes the difference, nothing of which is given, determined or guaranteed by any physiological apparatus. Yet many scientists and many more of those of a scientific bent are currently taking great delight in reducing human thought and creativity to material processes, thus denying the rational and ethical component to human evolution.

This reductionism and meaninglessness is all of a piece with the bleakness and pessimism of the mechanistic materialism which characterises the dominant paradigm of science. The merit of Darwin is that he saw the problem and sought to address it. For Darwin, the need to explain reason as the product of natural selection was a genuine problem. By pointing to natural selection in the evolution of the human mind, Darwin didn’t so much deny human intelligence as point to the richness of the mental lives of non-human animals. He was nevertheless clear that the intellectual capacities of humans are much more impressive than those of any other animal, even if they are differences of degree and not kind. This point is consistently misunderstood as having Darwin *reduce* humanity to a mindless animality. That wasn’t his point at all, and Darwin acknowledged the mental power and moral sense of human beings as a

creative factor in evolution. Darwin emphasised that human beings far exceed all other animals in linguistic ability, thought, and reason. Darwin may have denied differences of kind between humans and animals, but human beings are still free to creatively explore the differences of degree.

Within a mechanistic materialism, the human mind is nothing special, merely the product of the blind operation of chance events, as pointless and as meaningless as everything else within a universe of dead matter. Darwin saw the problem from the first: ‘But then arises the doubt, can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?’ (Darwin *Autobiography*.)

Precisely. Volumes of neuro-biology and books influenced by neuro-biology are being spewed out by people congratulating themselves on having ‘demystified’ mind, reason, thought, creativity. Everything that was once considered to make human beings special and unique is being reduced to ‘dead’ matter. Of course, in explaining physical processes alone, scientists have explained nothing at all about what those processes have produced. It would be possible to explain the biochemical and physiological processes at work within Beethoven when he composed the sixth symphony, but that explanation reveals nothing about that symphony as a piece of music. Scientists explain the easy and unimportant bit and think the explanation ends there.

Delivering a paper to a room of individuals of various backgrounds, I made an off-hand comment that evolution is ultimately about the expansion of mental powers and moral sensibility. The paper was really about Socrates as the founder of philosophy through his concern to give knowledge a moral component, bringing philosophy down to the world of human beings and not just about the physical properties of existence. I was going to go further and make the case for the development of a long term strategic thinking capacity as a condition for human survival and flourishing in a world facing increasing ecological constraints. I was also thinking of Darwin, hence the reference to ‘mental powers’ and ‘moral sense’, both quotes from Darwin. If the scientists in the room bristled at the word ‘moral’, they went ballistic at the word ‘mental’.

I was immediately taken to task by a scientist who, with a howl of outraged religious sensibility, shouted out ‘that’s got to be wrong’. I tried to cut short his impeccable but very long explanation of neurons and how they operate in order to elaborate my point – it seems reasonable that a point should have been made and defined properly in the first place before it is subject to lengthy criticism and rebuttal – but no, I got a curt ‘let me finish’ and I was given chapter and verse on neurons and how they fire and function. He did finish, eventually, and by then I had lost the will to live. The firing of neurons is not in doubt. I had been treated to a scientific *explanation* of neurons which, in itself, couldn’t be faulted. But that’s the point. It was *explanation*. It was science doing what science does, offering explanation of fact. That’s fine as far as it goes. But it doesn’t go any further than the world of fact, description, explanation. The physiological process behind the production of an idea can be *explained*, but that scientific explanation reveals nothing whatsoever about the content and quality and character of that idea, the very things that are of the most importance. I wanted to go on and stress the importance of ideas but instead got bogged down in scientific explanation. Of course, the easiest response would have been to have simply asked ‘how do you know?’ The response would have been good science, good ideas backed by evidence – the triumph of nous over neurons. Our knowledge gives us a self-awareness that makes us more than a pack of neurons.

There were many immediate responses to my scientist friend. He had failed to understand the very point of the paper concerning the importance of Socrates. The words ‘neuron’ and ‘sinew’ derive from the same etymology, the same stem *neu*. That makes Socrates’ central moral question one for contemporary neuro-scientists and neuro-biologists to answer – if they can.

For all of the scientific appeal to those of a materialist persuasion, neural networks explain nothing. To repeat, in Plato’s dialogue, Socrates asks himself why he is sitting in the prison awaiting a death he could *choose* to escape. Socrates’ position is not the assertion of mind over body, of mental over material – some scientists seem to assume that anyone who uses the word ‘mental’ is automatically in denial of the material - but of moral choice. Socrates did not agree with Anaxagoras, that his moral choice is due to the way that his mind controls his body.

This is merely another reductive assessment of the human predicament. It is not a case of mind over body, no more than it is body over mind.

As Socrates develops the point:

I am sitting here because my body consists of bones and sinews, because the bones are hard and are separated by joints, that the sinews are such as to contract and relax, that they surround the bones along with flesh and skin which hold them together, then as the bones are hanging in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the sinews enable me to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my limbs bent.

Socrates had been sentenced to death but had been offered exile. He also had ample opportunity to escape. If the principal aim of the human being as material body is to survive, then, from a scientific point of view, Socrates ought to have escaped prison and evaded death. According to the scientific world-view, Socrates' genes and neurons should have been miles away. Socrates chose to stay for reasons that science cannot explain – moral choice, ideas, principles.

So why am I sat here? Socrates' question is as forthright now as it was when he first put it and it is a question that reductive, materialistic science has no response to, since the answer is only connected with mind and body in an indirect sense – mediating between are politics, ethics, culture, the things by which human beings live their lives in a meaningful sense. Socrates could have escaped and survived. That he decided to overrule the scientific imperative and chose to stay and die indicates the extent to which human beings are defined by the moral capacity to choose right over wrong – to create meaning above and beyond scientific explanation. In sum, Socrates took his stand for a reason that science is not equipped to address. The 'cause' of his predicament is not a physical one at all, it is a moral one. The problem is not just that science has nothing to say on this moral capacity of human beings, it is that science refuses to accept its limitations in this area and is tempted to collapse the fact/value, object/subject, means/ends division, extending the former at the expense of the latter.

But I was intrigued by the violence with which my scientist friend took me to task for asserting the creativity of human mental and moral powers. It was genuine outrage, as though his deepest *beliefs* had been traduced. They had been. His reaction exposes the extent to which science is becoming a substitute religion, a belief system insulated from challenge and criticism.

The attitude is so riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies that it hardly seems worth the effort. It is worth discussing further since it is directly on this point of the value of philosophy as lying in the ability to discern the true, the good and the beautiful.

The outrage of scientists (some scientists, let's be clear, there is no need to employ a broad brush that covers all in one stroke) whenever the orthodoxy of mechanical materialism is even questioned is revealing. Scientist and thinker Jacob Bronowski once argued that to get a pertinent answer it is necessary to ask impertinent questions. There are some scientists who are increasingly less scientific in their readiness to ask or entertain such questioning.

But this question of neural determinism is worth examining closely. If neural networks is all that human beings – thought included – are, and if all the reality we see around us is nothing but an illusion we have projected upon inanimate and dead matter, the simple questions are begged 'why does it matter?' and 'how do you know?' They may be the simplest of philosophical questions but are sufficient to defeat assertions of neural determinism. Nous triumphs neurons every time.

My scientist friend could not answer Socrates' question and fell into silence for the next hour. Of course he did. Science is silent on moral questions. Science can say nothing about meaning, values, ends, morality. That seems to be causing some resentment, hence there is a strong suspicion that reductive materialist science is driven by the need to destroy what it cannot have – moral meaning. It sees a rival to its claims to explain the whole of human life and is conducting a constant war for control.

Let's take this further. The assertion of neural determinism is easily countered. We share neural networks with animals but, as Bronowski argued, human beings have learned to ride horses but there has never been a horse yet that has learned how to ride

a human being. That's learning as a change in behaviour, as doing something with biological capacities other than what is driven by instinct and impulse. It's called culture. It's like language. Human beings may have an innate grammar for living but what they do with that capacity is a matter of cultural growth and development, intellect and imagination, moral sense and insight. Again, there is nothing given in neural networks that determines human development in one way or another. All that there is is the knowledge of the proper functioning of neural pathways, which is indeed important in helping us determine the proper conditions of human flourishing. Apparently, neural connections making for human well-being are strengthened in the appropriate environmental and relational context. Well I never. Aristotle said as much over two millennia ago.

One could be really provocative here and bring in the new quantum physics. Theoretical physicist John Wheeler has argued strongly that the old mechanistic science is dead and that we are beyond dualisms of subject/object and knower/known in a 'participatory universe'.

In this participatory universe, everything is the observer and everything is the observed. What matters here is not the objectivity of the universe but its *intelligibility*.

The quantum world is cloudy and uncertain in its nature. There is a reality but not an objectivity to this world. French philosopher and physicist Bernard d'Espagnat writes of the 'veiled' character of quantum reality. The most truly philosophically profound of the founding physicists of quantum theory was Werner Heisenberg. It is significant that Heisenberg saw the value in Aristotle's concept of *potentia*. Heisenberg writes that:

In experiments about atomic events we have to do with things that are facts, with phenomena that are just as real as any phenomena in daily life. But the atoms or elementary particles are not as real; they form a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than of things or facts.

An electron does not all the time possess a definite position or a definite momentum, but rather it possesses the potentiality for exhibiting one or other of these if a measurement turns the potentiality into an actuality. I would disagree

with Heisenberg in thinking that this fact makes an electron 'not as real' as a table or a chair. The electron simply enjoys a different kind of reality, appropriate to its nature. If we are to know things as they are, we must be prepared to know them as they actually are, on their own terms, so to speak.

Heisenberg 1958

According to this reasoning, an electron does not all the time possess a definite position or a definite momentum. Rather, an electron possesses the *potentiality* for exhibiting the one or the other *if a measurement turns the potentiality into an actuality*. Heisenberg argues that this fact means that an electron is 'not as real' as a table or a chair. A better way of stating this is to argue that an electron is just as 'real' as a table or a chair, it's just that the whole notion of reality as *objective* is no longer tenable. The electron enjoys a *different kind of reality*, one that is appropriate to its nature and its own potentialities. Scientists of a mechanistic and materialist persuasion have spent centuries trying to drive purpose, the old Aristotelian *telos* out of nature. They never could manage it, even going to the extent of hiding Aristotle's teleology behind the new scientifically respectable term teleonomy. This no longer washes. To know things as they actually are, human beings must be mentally equipped to know them on their own terms, in terms of their own potentiality and actuality.

Physicists are keen to insist on the reality, appropriately understood, of electrons since the assumption of the reality of electrons, with all their subtle quantum properties, makes *intelligible* huge swathes of physical experience that would otherwise be hidden from us. It explains so much of life, from the chemical properties of atoms, the conduction properties of metals, and our ability to build electron microscopes. In fine, it is *intelligibility* and not objectivity that gives insight into and knowledge of reality.

One sees here how misguided notions of neural determinism really are, revealing the profound pessimism at the bottom of all purely mechanistic theories of the universe. This pessimistic streak was clear to all those with the nerve and the nous to face it from the start of the modern scientific era. It was exposed most clearly

by none other than the prophet of scientific progress himself, H. G. Wells, whose last book was entitled *Mind at the End of its Tether*. That is an apt phrase for the perverse delight that neuroscientists are taking in hunting the mind down to deny its creative autonomy. The most mechanistic field of science today is biology, and neuro-science is moulded in its image. This is a remarkable myopia, given that it is here where a crude nineteenth-century materialism still holds sway. This reveals the power of orthodoxy, science as a belief system whose adherents hold on to outdated notions and concepts with religious fervour. The more the beliefs are denied and contradicted, the more they are asserted. It is a strange situation when, at a time when the new physics has been making remarkable headway in theory, the science of biology still operates according to a mechanistic, 'billiard-ball' concept of 'dead' matter. On this foundation, biological evolution is the chance product of random events which 'move' things this way or that solely according to statistical averages. The human mind is simply the chance product of the blind operation of such random events, and is ultimately as futile and meaningless as everything else in this mechanistic universe. The militant atheists urging us to 'enjoy ourselves' take their stand on this crude materialism. The hot air that the science-religion animus generates begs the question of those asserting the superiority of a scientific materialism – why does it matter? It is one thing for materialists to assert the meaninglessness of the universe, it is another for them to carry on as if life itself does, after all, matter. On what basis? Stephen Hawking, having denied God and meaning and purpose, then tells us that life is still precious and still matters. On his own grounds of scientific materialism, he is not entitled to say that. So what, exactly, is his moral foundation? He is affirming some form of the belief that 'life is sacred', a notion of religious origins. There are no grounds for that argument in his own science.

To explain further, the essence of the nature of electrons is a veiled reality that is represented in human thought by the wavefunctions associated with them. When a physicist is thinking about what an electron is 'doing', it is the appropriate wavefunction that he or she has in mind. Clearly, this wavefunction is not as accessible an entity as the objective presence of a billiard ball. At the same time, however, the wavefunction does not function in quantum thinking in a way that suggests the positivistic notion that it is simply a calculational device. In other

words, the wavefunction is wraithlike, having the appearance of something living or thought to be alive. And this makes the electron an appropriate vehicle to be the carrier of the veiled potentiality of quantum reality.

Potentiality and intelligibility are crucial to this quantum reality. Clearly, it is impossible to decide in advance whether electrons should be particles or waves. This is the observer's choice, deciding which side of the black hole the photons would pass, even though it happened many millions of years ago. As Wheeler explains:

Since we make our decision whether to measure the interference of the two paths or to determine which path was followed a billion or so years after the photon started its journey, we must conclude that our very act of measurement not only revealed the nature of the photon's history on its way to us, but in some sense *determined* that history. The past history of the universe has no more validity than is assigned by the measurements we make - now!

Wheeler and Ford 1998: 337

The implications of Wheeler's arguments are profound and revolutionary, completely altering the way human beings see and relate to the universe. As Paul Davies and John Gribbin comment: 'In other words, the quantum nature of reality involves non-local effects that could in principle reach right across the Universe and stretch back across time.' (Davies and Gribbin 1991: 208)

On the basis of such reasoning, Wheeler came to a truly extraordinary conclusion with respect to the role of the mind in the universe. Realizing that the idea that observers influence what they observe barely scratches the surface, Wheeler proposed that we should think not in terms of observers but of *participants*. We are beyond Plato's spectator theory of knowledge here in being involved in producing in some way the reality of the world, its meaning, nature, purposes. We are involved in producing the world as well as in gaining knowledge of it. Wheeler asks whether the difference between observation and participation might be 'the most important clue we have to the genesis of the universe':

The phenomena called into being by these decisions reach backward in time in their consequences ... back even to the earliest days of the universe Useful as it is under everyday circumstances to say that the world exists 'out there' independent of us, that view can no longer be upheld. There is a strange sense in which this is a 'participatory universe'.

Wheeler in Wheeler and Zurek 1983: 194

Wheeler takes this idea to its logical extremes, arguing that: 'We are participators in bringing into being not only the near and here but the far away and long ago.' Plato asked: 'how can he who has magnificence of mind and is the spectator of all time and all existence, think much of human life?' How indeed? The whole perspective changes when one is a participant embracing all time and all existence and not merely a spectator. It is easy to think much of human life when one is a part of everything one sees.

On the basis of this reasoning, Wheeler reformulated the anthropic principle, the idea that the universe looks as though it was designed for life (weak version) or that the universe *is* designed for life (strong version). In Wheeler's view, it is human beings themselves who are designing the universe. For those inclined to dismiss this as science fiction, it is worth remembering that Wheeler was one of Britain's greatest theoretical physicists. This is a real challenge to the mechanistic materialism which dominates biology and neuro-biology.

Wheeler draws the extraordinary conclusion that the universe is not designed to produce intelligent life for the sheer fun of it; rather, intelligent life is necessary for the universe itself to exist. Writing in 1977 he stated:

The quantum principle shows that there is a sense in which what the observer will do in the future defines what happens in the past - even in a past so remote that life did not then exist, and shows even more, that 'observership' is a prerequisite for any useful version of 'reality'. One is led by these considerations to explore the working hypothesis that 'observership is the mechanism of genesis'.

John Archibald Wheeler in Butts and Hintikka 1975: 3.

Bernard Carr draws out the full significance of Wheeler's argument:

Wheeler has suggested a more radical interpretation in which the universe does not even come into being in a well-defined way until an observer is produced who can perceive it. In this case, the very *existence* of the universe depends on life.

Carr in Leslie (ed.) 1990: 152.

This participatory way of looking at the world is shared by a greater number of scientists than the mechanistic orthodoxy dares to admit. In his introduction to the 1958 edition of L.J. Henderson's *The Fitness of the Environment*, first published in 1913, Professor George Wald of Harvard finds it necessary to apologise for what many consider a startling 'new' concept, scientifically sound and justifiable as it is: 'Let me talk a little frank nonsense about this, make of it what you will. It would be a poor thing to be an atom in a universe without physicists. And physicists are made of atoms. A physicist is the atom's way of knowing about atoms.'

Or, following Wheeler, the rational thinking capacities of human beings are necessary for the universe itself to exist. The scientist is the universe's way of knowing about the universe.

There is an old Hebrew joke which has Yahweh berating Abraham for some misdemeanour or another. What would you be without me, Yahweh scolds. Without me, Abraham replies to Yahweh, you wouldn't even be known.

A human being is God's way of knowing about God. Life is a co-evolution.

Being even more provocative, the neuroscientist is the neuron's way of knowing about neurons.

As I should have asked my scientist friend after he had expounded at length on the nature of neural networks, 'how do you know?' We know, because that's what neuroscience tells us is true. Which means that knowledge is possible, that it is possible to distinguish truth from falsehood, that the world is more than the projection

of illusions upon inanimate dead matter – that human thought is more than neural activity.

Assertions of neural determinism are easily swept aside. Francis Crick, the scientist who discovered the genetic code for DNA, asserted that ‘you’re nothing but a pack of neurons’. Crick, the co-discoverer, with Watson, of the double-helical structure of DNA, here paraphrases *Alice in Wonderland*, “you’re nothing but a pack of cards”. Crick’s view may sound extreme but it neatly encapsulates the currently fashionable view of scientists on the subject. No matter what is going on in the mind, neurons do it all on their own. If consciousness exists at all — and that is a big if for many scientists – then it is no more than an *epiphenomenon*. Consciousness is merely some kind emanation produced by the activities of certain parts of the cerebral cortex and is totally incapable of influencing those activities. That was the point my scientist friend was making and, in so doing, he was doing no more than repeat current scientific orthodoxy. It’s not that he was wrong so much as that there is something awry in that orthodoxy.

Crick goes further to assert that although we think ourselves to be free and reasoning and choosing, this is merely an illusion. We see things this way because of the way our neural networks operate.

Human beings may feel as though they are in control of their thoughts and actions and hence are responsible for their lives. But that, scientists now tell us, is an illusion. When, at the end of the ponderings and deliberations that make up the day, you finally make a decision “I think”, “I believe,” “I like,” or “I will,” or determine on a gesture or a course of action, imagine being told that what you call your “self”, indeed your mind, has played no part in the resolution. Your self is no more than a spectator, not in Plato’s sense of magnificence of mind, the mind has played no role in proceedings, but in the sense of being a prisoner of puppetry, mistakenly imbuing illusions with a sense of importance, whilst all the while the neurons pull all the strings. Extreme exponents of the theory like Crick and Blackmore go so far as to assert that consciousness is itself an illusion, without real existence. We are no different to envatted brains, embodied neurons.

The assertion is that consciousness is a simple one-way epiphenomenon. Fine. But this begs the question of just how Francis Crick himself knows? Crick asserts a general neural determinism and therefore a general delusion that embraces all, and yet arrogates to himself the privilege of being able to speak from outside of this deterministic framework. The statement 'you're nothing but a pack of neurons' is a truth claim. But it is also self-contradictory, a typical philosophical paradox on the lines of 'all Cretans are liars'. If Crick is right, then the statement is false. Assuming that Crick is a member of the human species and possesses the same neural networks as the rest of us. In other words, Crick has himself broken the deterministic premise he asserts by making a truth claim. He has asserted the possibility of knowledge in a world of illusion. Crick's statement is meaningful only if truth can be discerned from falsehood, that is, if the claim that a neural determinism creating a world of illusion is itself false. Crick cannot assert a general neural determinism and at the same time pronounce from a position outside of that determinism. If he can do that, then there is no determinism.

There are many scientists, such as Stephen Hawking, EO Wilson, Richard Dawkins and Brian Cox, who are explicitly arguing that philosophy has been eclipsed because it has been unable to keep up with science, mathematics in particular. Here we see the value of philosophy. The failure to respect knowledge and insights deriving from other disciplines is leading scientists to make the crassest of errors based on faulty reasoning. (Hawking's last book contains a discussion of freedom and determinism that would shame an A level philosophy student.)

At the level of *explanation*, Crick reduces consciousness to the firing of neurons. But explanation is the easy part, the part that is not in contention. At no point does Crick address the nonlinear dynamics of conscious experience as an emergent property of the brain as a whole. This, not the firing of neurons, is the hard problem of consciousness, and Crick has nothing to offer here. The philosopher John Searle's challenge to neuro-determinists and reductionists remains: 'How is it possible for physical, objective, quantitatively describable neuron firings to cause qualitative, private, subjective experiences?' (Searle 1995.) We still wait an answer.

Crick's statement is worth quoting at length, since it reveals the perverse pleasure that neuro-determinists take in devaluing and denigrating the human experience:

'You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased it: 'You're nothing but a pack of neurons.'

Crick is not as clever as he thinks he is. In paraphrasing Carroll's Alice, Crick has badly missed the point. Alice was addressing inanimate objects, a pack of cards, not human beings. She was putting the human case against things and illusions. The full quote from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is: 'Who cares for you?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*).

And that's the point, human beings, as moral beings capable of moral choice and action, *can care* and *do care* for each other in a way that inanimate things and physical processes do not. Human beings grow to their full size in becoming moral beings, capable of moral choice, in relation to others. Any civilisation in which human beings cease to care for each other, or for anything else, will fall in on itself as quickly and as easily as does a house of cards. Human beings are a lot more than a pack of cards, a lot more than a pack of neurons. Crick had spectacularly failed to grasp Alice's point.

In stating that 'you're nothing but a pack of neurons', Crick ought to have added that, on the basis of our biology, we build a fragile house of cards. The human mind is delicate and does not always work as it should. Diseases of the brain strip away the workings of the mind. It is plainly inadequate for neuroscientists to refer in some general sense to our world as a projection of illusion. Such a view trivialises real diseases of the mind and the way they strip human beings of their humanity. Schizophrenia subjects a person to illusion in the most harsh and real form. Epilepsy can dissolve the conscious mind altogether, leaving a person as 'nothing but' the zombie within. Alzheimer's is a cruel disease that peels back all the layers of a person, in the end exposing an innermost lack of being. Depression, too, is malignant sadness that consumes the mind from within. All these conditions highlight the

vulnerability of the person and give us cause to value the human mind as much, much more than an epiphenomenon of physical processes. Reduced to 'nothing but' these processes, human beings cease to be human and give the chilling impression of being automata, walking dead, zombies, robots. We shall read shortly of scientists who have dreamed of being robots

And such scientists are not simply being provocative. Crick for one is deadly serious. Life may be a delicate house of cards, requiring that we look after mind and morality, but plainly doesn't care. Crick explains his view in detail, reducing consciousness to the firing of neurons, and asserting that conscious experience is an emergent property of the brain as a whole. Crick claimed that he never did anything for fame or fortune, only to drive the last nail in the coffin of vitalism. He failed. Crick never addresses the nonlinear dynamics of this process of emergence, and for that reason never comes close to solving the 'hard problem of consciousness'. As philosopher John Searle poses the challenge to neuroscience, 'How is it possible for physical, objective, quantitatively describable neuron firings to cause qualitative, private, subjective experiences?'

Neuroscience is still far from meeting that challenge. Nevertheless, the 'neuroreductionist' school is alive and well and continues to pursue the ambition of reducing consciousness to neural mechanisms. Thus, consciousness is 'explained away', in the words of neuroscientist Patricia Churchland, much like heat in physics was explained away once it was recognized as the energy of molecules in motion.

Francis Crick called this the Astonishing Hypothesis. 'This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people alive today that it can truly be called astonishing.' Most people would find an adjective a little stronger than 'astonishing' to describe the sheer inhumanity of this notion. But Crick is no crank but is clearly speaking for the scientific mainstream. Susan Greenfield, another neuroscientist, examined an exposed brain in an operating theatre and commented, 'This was all there was to Sarah, or indeed to any of us ... We are but sludgy brains, and ... somehow a character and a mind are generated in this soupy mess.' (Greenfield 2000: 12-15.)

If one is inclined to ask, in shock and horror, ‘Is that all there is?’, it seems that our neuroscientists are more than predisposed to assert ‘yes’. Which, again, begs the question why it matters? Why are they bothered?

Because it clearly does matter. If it didn’t, there would be all this heat and argumentation. So let us take Susan Blackmore’s argument that the world is nothing but an illusion determined by neural activities. Are we to understand from that that it doesn’t matter whether or not Nazism prevails in politics, with all the associated madness and murder that comes with it. Anyone steeped in history has long since learned to be wary whenever science starts to use the reductive language of ‘nothing but’; it usually means that human beings are about to be on the receiving end of some scientific delusion or other. We have, of course, been this way many times before. Eugenics, behaviourism, the genes and genetic determinism, socio-biology. How many scientists have studied primate behaviour in order to better understand human society? And what great conclusions followed? Reduced to instincts, human beings engage in a lot of sex and violence. Shorn of the ‘illusions’ of morality, principles, norms, codes and so on, human beings *reduced to their biological equipment* behave in a manner that means that life is ‘nasty, brutish and short’. The quote is from Hobbes, which is a way of telling the Young Turks of science that we know, we have known this for some time. The axial religions were born of an era of violence and brutality. The great achievement of these religions was to have founded great civilisations that enabled human beings to rub along with each other, flourish even. Bear that in mind when Dawkins’ inspired neo-Darwinian barbarians seek to knock away more moral codes and rational restraints in the interests of enlightenment.

An underlying current in this neuro-determinism or neuro-reductionism is the point blank denial of the autonomy of ideas and ethics and a refusal to take ideas seriously in their own right. Instead, one sees a mechanisation of the mind sphere.

Of course, these scientists have to smuggle culture back in. A straight neural determinism is so crude as to be laughable. It purports to explain everything and yet cannot even explain itself. So culture is smuggled back in in the form of a meme-gene co-evolution. But there is no recognition that culture has achieved an autonomy of biology, far from it. Susan Blackmore develops Richard Dawkins’s idea of the meme

to propose a mechanisation of the mind sphere. For Dawkins, evolution is a competition between 'replicators' (usually genes) for 'vehicles' (usually bodies). Good replicators must have three properties: fidelity, fecundity and longevity. With these three properties, natural selection for progressive improvement is not just likely – it is inevitable. Blackmore develops this argument further to claim that many ideas and units of culture are sufficiently enduring, fecund and high-fidelity to therefore compete to colonise brain space. Words and concepts therefore provide the selection pressure to drive the expansion of the brain. The better brains are at copying ideas, the better they cause their bodies to thrive.

Without accepting this reduction of ideas and ethics to a technology of power, colonisation and control, we can understand why, if this is the case, Dawkins et al target religion in the most vehement and vicious of ways – it is a world view which they perceive as a rival to their own scientific world view. In *The Dawkins Delusion*, scientist and Christian Alister McGrath takes Richard Dawkins to task not for his theological ignorance but most of all for his poor reasoning. A selective approach to evidence, setting up straw men to knock down, the presentation of the extreme as the norm and so on are well-known ways that second rate minds and politicians use to load the argument. McGrath is worth quoting at length:

Dawkins simply offers the atheist equivalent of slick hellfire preaching, substituting turbocharged rhetoric and highly selective manipulation of facts for careful, evidence-based thinking. Curiously, there is surprisingly little scientific analysis in *The God Delusion*. There's a lot of pseudoscientific speculation, linked with wider cultural criticisms of religion, mostly borrowed from older atheist writings. Dawkins preaches to his god-hating choirs, who are clearly expected to relish his rhetorical salvos, and raise their hands high in adulation. Those who think biological evolution can be reconciled with religion are dishonest! *Amen!* They belong to the 'Neville Chamberlain school' of evolutionists! They are appeasers! *Amen!* *Real* scientists reject belief in God! *Hallelujah!* The God that Jews believed in back in Old Testament times is a psychotic child abuser! *Amen!* *You tell them, brother!*

When I read *The God Delusion* I was both saddened and troubled. How, I wondered, could such a gifted popularizer of the natural sciences, who once had such a passionate concern for the objective analysis of evidence, turn into such an

aggressive anti-religious propagandist, with an apparent disregard for evidence that was not favourable to his case? Why were the natural sciences being so abused in an attempt to advance atheist fundamentalism? I have no adequate explanation.

McGrath 2007 Intro

Many sober scientists like Robert Winston have also been troubled and non-plussed by Dawkins' extreme stance. They pay too much respect to his scientific credentials and presume that his argument is, or ought to be, based on reason. They cannot explain Dawkins' stance because they do not see it for what it is – it is an aggressive attempt to replace religious and ethical meaning with mechanistic science. Religion is a competitor in a memetic struggle for survival and Dawkins has gone to war.

The reason why some scientists make religion such a target isn't difficult to understand. It has nothing to do with the triumph of reason over superstition, knowledge over ignorance. Dawkins' mode of argumentation pays no respect whatsoever to reason. The fact is, in evolutionary terms, religion is the biggest winner of all. If the neo-Darwinism that Dawkins espouses is true and reproductive success is a measure of inclusive fitness, then every neo-Darwinian should abandon atheism immediately and embrace religious faith. As Jonathan Sacks put it in *The Great Partnership*, 'no genes have spread more widely than those of Abraham, and no memes more extensively than that of monotheism.' But this is a matter of memetic struggle and competition, not reason and truth. The bigots are to be found on both sides of the science-religion war. One extreme always provokes another, and characters like Dawkins knows this. He reserves the most abuse for scientists like Stephen Jay Gould who argue for the compatibility of science and religion. Moderates for Dawkins are the problem. He likes extreme positions precisely because he wants a war. The danger is that having divided opinion to extremes, the vast majority of us left in the middle are left facing extreme options. Either way, bigots and fundamentalists win and reason loses. Philosophy asserts that there are other options.

The epiphenomenon-illusion theory comes with the corollary that there is no free will. This denial is not outrageous in itself. Many philosophical positions locate the source of our problems in an exaggerated sense of the importance of the ego. But there is a debate to be had about the relation of freedom and determinism. Freedom and free will cannot be so callously discarded without having secured some kind of moral foundation. That way lies a moral wasteland in which anything goes. The advocates of this view understand that their denial of free will undermines the notion of moral responsibility, the basis of the legal system and a cornerstone of human civilization. That ought to have been a cause for caution. However, they stick to the view that scientific truth must be stated regardless of the consequences. So they insist that whether human beings have, or do not have, free will, it makes no difference in practice. In reality, all that matters are the behaviours and wired-in connections built around the free-will illusion. This determinism is the inevitable consequence of the brain-mind relationship as analysed by neuroscience. As bleak as this neural determinism may sound, Susan Blackmore cheerily affirms its liberatory effects. For Blackmore "there is no truth in the idea of an inner self inside my body that controls the body and is conscious. Since this is false, so is the idea of my conscious self having free will." (Blackmore 1999, 237). And she concludes: "In this sense, we can be truly free." (Blackmore 1999: 246).

Free to do what, one may ask? Free to engage in art, literature, believe in what we want to believe in, sing and dance and to engage in the very things we are already happily doing, paying no regard at all to the constant claims of neuroscience to 'demystify' our most creative efforts.

That claim was contained in the title of the book *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, written by Jonah Lehrer. The author claimed to be able to explain the processes behind Proust's genius for writing. The author oversells his ware, however. Proust was not a neuroscientist; he was a writer whose genius stemmed from his ability to read and tap into human experience and emotion, his insight into the human condition, his relation to and observation of others, his respect for their common humanity. Those qualities are singularly lacking in the endless stream of publications in the field of neuroscience. But the claim that Proust was a neuroscientist is revealing in that it implies that a writer of great fiction knew innately all the

neuroscience he needed to know for great art and creativity. Indeed Lehrer's point concerns the way that artistic ideas anticipate strictly scientific ideas. Which begs the question as to why contemporary neuroscience is so determined to *reduce* the creative process to neurological processes? It seems that artists have no need of neuroscientists and have an innate grasp of neuroscience. Neuroscientists, however, are clueless when it comes to art, literature and music.

Unfortunately, neuroscientists are not inclined to know their place when faced with genius, no more than when faced with nature. With a little knowledge comes the fateful temptation to meddle. Just as science can improve on nature, so we are now told that science can improve on creative genius. When a neuro-scientist can write like Proust or paint like Van Gogh or sing like Maria Callas, I will take note. Of course if, in the unlikely event any neuro-scientist should manage to attain such creative heights they will of course have ceased to be neuro-scientists and will instead have become writers, artists, singers of genius.

The mind boggles to think of what a neuro-scientist would have made of the neural connections of a William Blake or a Van Gogh, but the suspicion is that that they would see ample scope for 'improvement'.

To be fair to Lehrer, he himself is sceptical of the exaggerated claims made by some neuroscientists and many with a scientific background outside of neuroscience to be able to explain complex cultural and psychological phenomena. Lehrer stays just short of the traps of journalistic neuro-science and avoids grandiose cultural claims extrapolated from explanations of how the brain functions. He focuses on the specific neural circuits and goes in search of the neurological source codes of such things as empathy, psychopathology, imagination, creativity. But if Lehrer sails close to the wind, many of those influenced by this kind of approach are much less cautious. Lehrer offers a neurological explanation of how the mind works creatively and imaginatively and gives a vivid portrayal of the brain at work. The problems come when some are tempted to make a very big jump from this neurological explanation to art, literature, music and all the specific things that human beings do and say. Just how does the explanation of neural correlates add anything of significance to the creative processes of human life? A neuroscientist no doubt gains

some satisfaction from knowing how the brain works, but that is only the beginning of the human story, not the end. And it certainly isn't the whole story. What explanatory mechanism does a neuroscientist bring not just to the creative process as such but to the specific creations of human thought and imagination? It is telling that neuroscientists continually have to fall back on tired old and inadequate computer metaphors when delineating the connections between the rudimentary knowledge of brain circuits and the language of the mind.

It has to be significant that when it comes to addressing these questions, neuroscientists tend to drop the neuroscience and strike out in the direction of environment and experience. Intelligence is not only in the genes but in the environment. Throughout the twentieth century, IQ scores have consistently risen with improvements to the quality of the environment. With greater equality with men, women have been remarkable IQ gains by women. It is plainly wrong to interpret a lower or a higher IQ as implying genetic inferiority or superiority. Developing nations show rapid IQ gains, a phenomenon which is clearly linked to improvements in the quality of the environment.

The problem doesn't seem to be with the neuroscience so much as with the neuroscientists. What critics take to be a dehumanisation seems actually to be welcomed by some neuroscientists. Francis Crick made his concerns explicit in his book *Of Molecules and Men* (1966). He denounced vitalism in the most violent terms and asserted his belief that 'the ultimate aim of the modern movement in biology is in fact to explain all biology in terms of physics and chemistry'. His mechanistic approach is essentially reductionist, seeking to explain wholes in terms of their parts. At his funeral, Crick's son Michael said that his father's motivation was not the desire to be famous, wealthy or popular, but 'to knock the final nail into the coffin of vitalism'. That just reads as sad, to be possessed with such a destructive aim rather than a creative ambition. Iris Murdoch asks sagely, "It is always a significant question to ask of any philosopher: what is he afraid of?" It seems very pertinent to ask why so many scientists are so obsessed by the need to destroy vitalism, the theory that living organisms are truly alive, and not explicable in terms of physics and chemistry alone. The answer isn't difficult to find. Failure to dispose of vitalism leaves mechanistic materialism on quick sand. Crick failed in his life's ambition. The

problems of life and consciousness remain outside of physics and chemistry and biology and that is something that those who make the arrogant claim that science is *everything* can't handle. It is an existential crisis for those who take their materialist faith seriously. It is as though some scientists argue that human beings are like automata with no free will because they themselves actually *want* to experience themselves as automata. Those inclined to think this criticism far fetched should consider what the psychologist Kevin O'Regan told his fellow materialist, neuroscientist Susan Blackmore, 'Ever since I've been a child I've wanted to be a robot. I think one of the great difficulties of human life is that one's life is inhabited by uncontrollable desires and that if one could only be master of those and become more like a robot one would be much better off.' We are back to the chilling indifference that scientists show to the problem of distinguishing diseases of the mind from the mind as such in the epiphenomenon-illusion theory. It is no distance at all from thinking oneself to be a robot to thinking that everyone else is a robot too, 'just labouring under the illusion that they weren't'. The human being as the envatted brain again. Even the neuro-reductionist Blackmore understood that a robot with emotions it could control is an unusual kind of robot. Although O'Regan extended materialist theories to the realm of private life, even he endowed his robot-self with a desire to be master of his emotions, something which implies both conscious experience and choice. Such a being is invested with personhood, with added layers of mentality and morality over and above the neural networks.

Our neurons are not destiny, no more than genes determine our behaviour. Such notions are the quaint relics of a naive age of materialist science. The march of neuroscience continues to discover just which neural circuitry goes wrong in any given mental disorder, and what neurotransmitters are awry when a person goes to one or another temperamental extreme. Fine, but things are not so simple. If neurons really were all, there could be no differences within human behaviour whatsoever. Instead, there is a wide variety of human behaviour in different times and places. At risk of making a trite observation, education, environment and experience count much more than biology.

A number of other neuroscientists, and those influenced by them, have, in various ways, concluded that since we are nothing but a pack of neurons, we have no choice but to act the way we act, asking at the same time just *who* is denied the choosing? There is nothing but to accept the way things are and act accordingly.

This savours a little of Spinoza's intellectual appreciation of the single divine/natural substance, seeing our role within the whole and acting accordingly. As has been seen with respect to the notion of functioning in Spinoza, there is a case for moving beyond the dualism of freedom and necessity. Notions of free will can, by inducing us to close in on our ego, mislead and misguide so that we choose against our greater health and well-being.

This is where the claim that neuroscience, in understanding creativity, can help and facilitate the creation of creative as opposed to decreative environments and cultures. We are nevertheless entitled to ask 'is that all?' We have known about the influence of environmentalism upon human behaviour and the need to construct the appropriate conditions for human flourishing since Aristotle and probably since ever, in an innate sense. Now it seems we need a high level of scientific proof and evidence before doing the obvious, a case of paralysis through analysis. This seems to be a case of neurosclerosis, a condition in which action is justified and attempted only after scientists have offered proof and evidence.

This is not just a scientific battle, but concerns the world of politics and ideas, shaping the way we live in a most direct and profound way. One needs only to consider the claims that many continually make for contemporary neuroscience to understand this. Each week, the newspapers are full of book reviews and research findings concerning brain scans which purport to reveal the secrets of anything from consciousness to altruism. There are many remarkable things about this reporting, but most striking of all is the breathtaking assumption on the part of scientists that no-one has had anything much to say on these issues and that current scientific research is ploughing new terrain. The best that contemporary neuroscience has to offer, it will be shown shortly, is firmly in the tradition of Aristotelian flourishing and socialist environmentalism.

The worst neuroscience continues the tradition of mechanistic materialism and nineteenth century utilitarianism. And it is this neuro-science that most easily makes the jump from the laboratory to the government. The advocates of this reductive materialist approach claim to provide firm foundations for public policies that promote the ways in which individuals can live more happily. We can all agree about the end.

The dispute pertains to the means. Richard Layard justifies this new utilitarianism in his book, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. Happiness is a nice Aristotelian notion, *eudaimonia*, meaning flourishing in a social environment that connects each and all within mutually beneficial reciprocal relations. Layard takes a different approach to happiness. He notes that policymakers have become sceptical of Jeremy Bentham's idea that a good society is one in which happiness is maximised for the greatest number of people. No-one can say for certain what it is for individuals to be truly happy. The emphasis instead has been focused on maximising individual rights or opportunities. These are legal entitlements that are tangible, in contrast to the intangible character of happiness. This situation has now changed, claims Layard: since happiness can now be measured, it can be put back on the public agenda as a goal of government. Layard's central claim is that happiness has been made tangible by 'solid psychology and neuroscience.'

Such a notion has the potential to vindicate the old Aristotelian project of biology and other science strengthening human flourishing in the practical domains of ethics and politics. And, as such, I would find it worthy of support.

But it is question begging. Are we going to get a new Benthamic utilitarianism or a new Aristotelian flourishing? It depends on how we evaluate the proof and evidence based on 'solid psychology and neuroscience'.

John Crabbe, a behavior geneticist at the Oregon Health and Science University and the Portland VA Medical Center, published research concerning an experiment with rodents in the prestigious journal *Science*, which caused all manner of disturbance amongst neuroscientists. Crabbe demonstrated how the most minor differences between laboratories, such as how the mice were handled, created wide disparities in the behaviour of the mice. This implied a difference in how identical genes act. This and other such experiments suggest that genes are more dynamic than scientists have assumed.

It's not just which genes and neurons we are born with that matters, but the way that education, environment and experience shape their expression. Haven't we heard this before? After much scientific huffing and puffing, the mountain has laboured and brought forth the mouse of nature and nurture. Crabbe's rodent experiments seriously

underestimate the point, given that human beings are so much more complex and sophisticated than mice.

Such observations put to an end the age old debate on nature versus nurture: do our genes or our experiences determine who we become? That debate is rendered neatly redundant, thankfully, since it is based on the fallacy that our biological equipment and our environment are independent of each other. They are not. To debate whether the balance lies with nature or nurture is really like arguing whether length or width contributes more to the area of a rectangle.

It is biologically impossible for genes and neurons to operate autonomously of the human environment and experience. Genes are *designed* to be regulated by signals from their immediate environs, comprising hormones from the endocrine system and neurotransmitters in the brain, some of which, in turn, are shaped profoundly by our social interactions and experiences. These determine a distinct batch of genomic on-off switches.

The conclusion is, then, that our genes are necessary but not sufficient to produce an optimally operating neural system. Human flourishing – to employ a good old Aristotelian term – requires not just a necessary set of genes but an environment which facilitates appropriate social interactions and experiences. This combination of education, environment and experience ensures that the right genes will operate in the most optimal way for human flourishing. This points past a genetic and neural determinism to a "social epigenetics." "Social epigenetics is part of the next frontier in genomics," says Crabbe. "The new technical challenge involves factoring in the impact of environment on differences in gene expression. It's another blow against the naive view of genetic determinism: that our experiences don't matter—that genes are all."

As anyone involved in teaching will tell you, learning may be defined as a change in behaviour. The human experience is all about learning. Oscar Wilde defined experience as the name we give to our mistakes. But human beings learn from experience. The human brain is attuned to its environmental surrounds and is designed to change itself in response to accumulated experience. Some learn quicker than others, for the reason that

some brain systems are more responsive to these social influences than are others. Social epigenetics expands the range of factors and experiences which regulate genes to include relationships. Human beings are social animals requiring other people in order to be themselves and flourish. That's all in Aristotle. Neuroscientists have had all manner of trouble dealing with genetically hybrid mice in meticulously controlled laboratories. The human world is far more complex than the mouse world.

Neural networks are not just given but have the character of habits, a repeated traversing that shows how neural pathways are laid down in the brain. Every time the same sequence gets followed, the connections made in a neural circuit become strengthened, until eventually the pathways become so strong that they are the automatic route—and a new circuit has been put in place.

Since the human brain packs so much circuitry in so little space, there is continuous pressure to extinguish those connections no longer required, making space for those it does need. In a ruthless neural Darwinism, brain circuits vie with one another to survive, the losing neurons being "pruned" as being no longer required.

The brain is never given once and for all. Over time, the brain will selectively lose half the neurons originally supplied with, keeping those that are used and losing those that are neglected. This means that the brain is sculpted as a result of environment and experience - including the social interactions and relationships we have with each other.

In addition to determining what neural connections are preserved, social relationships shape the human brain by guiding the connections made by new neurons. The old assumptions of neuroscience can no longer be maintained. Students may still be taught that the brain cannot manufacture new cells. This theory is false. Sound research now shows that the brain and spinal cord contain stem cells that turn into new neurons at the rate of thousands a day. Further, whilst the pace of neuron creation peaks during childhood, it continues into old age, thus disproving the old assumption of continuous depreciation.

The emphasis is upon social interactions, relations and experiences within an environment that facilitates a neural connectivity that forms the grounding of a crucial set of social intelligence skills. Neuroscientist Richard Davidson argues clearly that "After our brain registers emotional information, the prefrontal cortex

helps us manage our response to it skillfully. The shaping of these circuits by genes interacting with the experiences in our life determines our affective style: how quickly and strongly we respond to an emotional trigger, and how long it takes us to recover."

Certainly, with respect to learning the self-regulatory skills crucial to smooth social interactions, "There is a lot more plasticity early in life than later. The animal evidence indicates that some of the effects of early experience can be irreversible so that once a circuit is shaped by the environment in childhood, it then becomes quite stable."

It is in this kind of area that neuroscience has plenty to offer. It needs emphasising that this social epigenetics is light years away from the dreary neural determinism of the neuro-reductionists like Crick, Blackmore et al.

This does not imply a freedom to change behaviour in any autonomous sense. The term "neural scaffolding" describes how once a brain circuit has been laid out, its neural connections become strengthened with repeated use. Human beings are always making their own history with something, out of something; that 'something' in some way always constrains as well as enables behaviour. Karl Marx was certainly on the right lines here in arguing that human beings make their own history, just not in conditions of their own choosing. It is, then, not a question of free will and choice but of the creative realisation of immanent potentialities, in the person and in the environment. We are the creators of our circumstances but are also constrained by these circumstances.

The notion of neural scaffolding explains why a behavioural pattern, once it is established, requires effort to change. The point to emphasise, though, is that change is possible, laying down and strengthening new tracks with new opportunities, or even with the right effort and awareness. Experience, education, social influence, relation and interaction cannot change every gene, nor modify every neural tic. However, what human beings experience in their everyday life continues to sculpt their neural circuitry. The great value of neuroscience lies in being able to specify with remarkable accuracy just how this sculpting operates.

At its best, neuroscience is giving scientific backing to the old arguments of 'rational' philosophy, the idea that the freedom of each individual is conditional upon the freedom of all, that human flourishing requires a social, institutional and ethical matrix that enables human beings to develop and realise their potentialities and exercise their capacities in a social context. Martin Buber distinguishes I-Thou or I-You relations, intersubjective relations between persons, from I-It relations, the relation of person to an object. An I-It environment is dehumanising and depersonalises human beings, teaching the worst possible neural lessons – criminal behaviour, pathological behaviour, selfishness, stupidity and so on. Survival in the I-It environment requires an amygdala that is set for paranoid hypervigilance, cultivating a protective emotional distance or outright distrust, and a propensity for violence and a readiness to fight. The I-It environment is a reductive and materialistic environment that objectifies human life and makes human beings mere automata responding to ends external to them. It is an environment which is designed for fostering criminal and pathological instincts.

Hence the point that the nature-nurture debate is redundant. The I-It environment nurtures the worst aspects of human nature. The task is to create an I-Thou environment that nurtures the best, mutually supportive, aspects of human nature. Such an environment creates the best "schools" for people, most particularly those still in their teens and twenties, who may have a full and flourishing life ahead of them. If human beings live in an environment which enhances the human ontology, it follows that they lead a full and flourishing life. Instead of advocating punitive and restrictive approaches that inhibit the human ontology, and generate criminal, pathological and egoistic behaviour, neuroscience at its best is making it possible to conceive correction and learning from the standpoint of social neuroplasticity. This refers to the shaping of brain circuitry through beneficial social interactions and experiences. A great many people are leading less than optimal lives because of neural deficits in the social brain. Whether these refer to impaired empathy and impulse control, the point is that we increasingly know how to create the right environments and facilitate the right experiences to foster the right neural connections in the social brain.

Given what neuroscience reveals about the way that the brain circuit continues to grow and be shaped, society has a choice between strengthening the circuitry for hostility, impulsivity, egoism and violence, or strengthening the circuitry for self-control, thinking before acting, empathy, reciprocity and other-regardness and the

ability to obey the law. This is the great possibility missed by the neuro-reductionists, the failure to help and enable those people who are still within the window of opportunity where the social brain remains most plastic. The lessons that people learn day by day leave a profound and lasting imprint in shaping their neural destiny. Whether this destiny is for better or for worse depends on the environment established and the social interactions, influences and experiences facilitated within.

In the current I-It environment, this neural destiny is shaped for the worst. The tragedy is two-fold, a constant failure to take the opportunity to reshape the neural circuitry that can put people on track to a full and flourishing life along with a continual plunging of human beings back into a dehumanised and depersonalised environment designed for criminality and pathology.

Neuroscience creates the possibility for an evidence-based long term strategic plan for turning lives around, seeking to restore the connective tissue that links individuals with those who care what happens to them. Neural networks within thus form part of a sinewy social intelligence that tie each and all together in a flourishing society. This is to seek to integrate individuals within a web of relationships that facilitate human flourishing. Strengthening the right neural connections within is combined with the creation of those supportive connections without that encourage the best and most healthy human behaviour, from the neighbourhoods upwards.

The evidence is clear that weaving individuals together in an I-Thou social matrix fosters human flourishing through strengthening the right neural connections. These connections encourage individuals to awaken their empathy and hence to change their perception of others and of their environment from an objective It to a human You.

In this way, science and ethics can be related, and the dualism of fact and value, is and ought can be overcome. We can have moral truth as something related to human flourishing in an environment greater than the ego. A sinewy social intelligence and moral truth allows us to declare peace between Socrates and the scientists.

This is to take neuroscience far beyond the mechanistic materialism of some of its most vocal adherents, exposing Francis Crick's assertion 'you're nothing but a pack of neurons' to be not only crass but just plain wrong.

There is no escaping social experience and no escaping that moral choice first formulated with force, clarity and vigour by Socrates. Human beings are not automata, that much should be clear by now. But any lingering doubt that remains should be removed by reference to Viktor Frankl.

Viktor Frankl was a neurologist of some distinction and renown. He was also a Jew who spent three years in concentration camps, a prisoner of the Nazis. Knowing that it is meaning that makes life worth living, Frankl held onto his sanity by observing his fellow prisoners, as though he and they were part of an experiment.

Frankl observed first the shock and disillusionment as the Nazis dehumanised their prisoners, stripping them of every vestige of humanity: clothes, shoes, hair, names, everything but their bodies. Here is the dehumanised reality of human beings shorn of culture and *reduced* to their biology. The Nazis also seized Frankl's most precious possession, a manuscript containing his life's work as a scientist.

The next stage was characterised by apathy, a complete dulling of the emotions. The prisoners no longer lived, they merely survived from day to day; they had become automata. The eighteenth century materialist La Mettrie wrote of 'man the machine'. Here were men and women reduced to machines, to their mere physical operation. It was at this point that Frankl asked the fateful question that all biological determinists and reductionists should be made to answer – what freedom is left to a person who has been robbed of everything: dignity, possessions, even the power of decision itself? The Jews had been persecuted throughout history but where formerly there had been a choice either to convert or die now, during the Holocaust, even that had been removed - there was no choice. Is there anything left to a person once everything there was to lose is about to be taken away? Frankl came to the understanding that there was one freedom that could never be taken away:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

Frankl 1986: 86

This is Socrates case for the moral dignity of human beings, that moral capacity above both mind and body. Even in the most adverse of circumstances, human beings retained freedom in the form of the decision how to respond. Frankl found his meaning in these most dehumanised of environments by observing others and by helping them find a reason to continue living. Bertrand Russell justifies an heroic despair in face of the meaninglessness of the universe. It takes greater heroism and courage to continue to hope in the face of the adversity of the concentration camps. But that is what Viktor Frankl teaches. The complete absence of hope created a condition which Frankl called 'futurelessness', a deadening experience that denies life all meaning and all hope. Frankl recalls, 'A prisoner marching in a long column to a new camp remarked that he felt as if he were walking in a funeral procession behind his own dead body.' Human beings need meaning, a hope, a sense of direction towards something bigger and better, a feeling of being part of something greater than the individual ego and its concerns.

Frankl persuaded two of his fellow prisoners against suicide by arguing that each still had work to do in life, one to complete his series of books on geography, the other to see his daughter again. Reduced to self-seeking automata, the lives of both prisoners were already over, no longer worth living in such conditions. As part of a greater whole, those lives still had unfulfilled purpose and potentiality. Frankl convinced both that something remained for them to do in life's bigger picture that could be done by no one else but them. Both survived.

Frankl also survived and drew on his experiences to develop a new school of psychotherapy, logotherapy, from the Greek *logos*, meaning 'word' in the broadest sense, including the spiritual dimension of human life, that which endows life with a sense of purpose. After the war Frankl wrote the book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Above and beyond biology, beyond genes and neurons, *homo sapiens* is the rational species that seeks meaning. The human being is the meaning-seeking animal. However, to preserve meaning in dire circumstances, human beings must be able to do three things.

1. Human beings must refuse to believe that they are victims of fate. Within limits, human beings are free, authors of their own lives.
2. Human beings must understand that there is more than one way of interpreting what happens to them. There is more than one way of telling the story of life.
3. Human beings must realise that meaning lies outside them as a call from somewhere else.

In the last resort, man should not ask, 'What is the meaning of my life?' but should realise that he himself is being questioned. Life is putting its problems to him, and it is up to him to respond to these questions by being responsible; he can only answer to life by answering *for* his life. Life is a task. The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission. This means that he is also aware of the taskmaster, the source of his mission. For thousands of years that source has been called God.

Frankl 1986:13

This understanding does not deny the value, the legitimacy and the importance of neurology and biology. The key question is whether such knowledge makes any positive contribution to theory and practice and offers any answer to the question of what it is to be a human being. The answer is, I think, affirmative, if not necessarily clear. Ethics, as a system of moral thought, entails practical suggestions concerning how human beings ought to live and, as such, is founded on a view as to what human nature is. This point applies also to those doctrines which assert that there is no human nature, since such a view implies that human beings are plastic by nature. Quite often, such beliefs concerning human nature are wrong, and this has led to scepticism as to the whole notion. From this perspective, any discipline which aids understanding of human nature is to be welcomed as helping us to avoid erroneous conceptions. Let it be stated clearly, then, that neuroscience and neuro-biology have a valuable role to play in seeking to understand human nature and in emphasising the legitimacy of the notion of human nature. Philosophy has lost its way through the loss of the sense of human nature as a meaningful question.

That said, neuro-science and neuro-biology are not philosophy and cannot in themselves constitute an ethical position. The overweening claims made by scientists in these areas are precisely what this book is concerned to contest, not the legitimacy of neuro-science qua neuro-science but the claim that neuro-science exhausts the claims of philosophy and ethics and can take the place of moral philosophy and religion.

Claims made on behalf of neuroscience with respect to human choice, freedom, creativity, thought show a dangerous tendency to conflate explanation and description with prescription. In so doing, scientists come dangerously close to precipitously reading an 'ought-to-be' from an 'is', as though morality can be read from nature or, worse, as though morality is a mere epiphenomenon, an illusion at best in relation to physical existence. This tendency either doesn't understand what moral philosophy is or, more likely, just plainly disrespects moral philosophy. This is arrogance and conceit and results in exaggerated claims and fallacious reasoning.

Scientific knowledge, explanation and description of human nature does not in itself constitute a moral position. The case for moral philosophy stems from this insufficiency of science. To state the point simply, science deals with the world of fact, of physical existence and physiological processes, whereas moral philosophy deals with the world of value. Moral philosophy is thus an attempt to understand, clarify, signify and harmonize the knowledge which science generates concerning the different sides of human nature. It is not a case of opposing one camp to the other, as though the world of value is opposed to the world of fact. There are two ways in which human beings, as the subject of ethics, may be treated, as a matter of fact, what human beings are, or as a matter of value, what human beings ought-to-be. That both approaches lead us to the same thing – human beings – does not mean that the two ways are themselves the same and that one should reduce to or give way to the other. This is the case for moral philosophy as against the claims being made for neuro-science. To carefully demarcate fact and value is surely right. Ethics is currently being subjected to a concerted assault in the name of neuro-science which is misguided and misinformed and certain not only to cause moral mayhem but to result in the findings coming from the field of neuro-science being wasted in a futile pursuit. To reduce human thought to the physiological process

of thinking is to focus on the least important and least interesting aspects of neuroscience. To what end, one may ask. This is how Einstein's brain works? Whatever may follow from that knowledge, it isn't ethics and says nothing about how human beings ought to behave in order to realise their innate potentials. And it is to reduce all the interesting questions to the one trivial concern. A description of a physical process is just that, of no greater import in itself. To say more requires ethics. It is like asking whether the truths of physics are derived from rational principles or from observation of the material facts? The simple answer to this question is "yes." When it comes to truths of human nature we are not dealing with the facts of physiological and neurological processes and the values, thoughts, cultures of functioning societies as mutually exclusive. Both show essential aspects of human nature. Those who make culture alone constitutive of human nature express the view that human beings are wholly plastic. This is a one-sided view that ignores the innateness of certain essential aspects of human nature. At the same time, those who ignore culture and history and make human thought and creativity the product of genes and neurons are likewise guilty of a one-sided view. That is the view I am concerned to repudiate here.

It therefore seems reasonable to begin with the assumption—many scientists would call it a belief — that consciousness is a real thing. Human beings are conscious beings. Human beings certainly think themselves to be conscious beings. The whole richness of our social as well as our inner life is linked to this faculty for conscious thought, deliberation, action. Upon consciousness depends our ability to reason, to communicate, to laugh, to create, to enjoy, to suffer, to love, as well as all the power to express our essential being when we act in accordance with those perceptions. However illusory some neuroscientists think that such abilities and powers may be, in the very least our being conscious of them is itself not an illusion. Ultimately, the crucial matter is not the existence or otherwise of consciousness, but what consciousness does and what we do with it. We are back to the distinction between spectating and participating, to Spinoza's intellectual appreciation of our functioning within a self-subsistent whole. Is Spinoza's intellectual appreciation passive within the whole or an active part? Active in what way? In terms of playing its one and only role or in some way creating the whole? In the terms of the above argument we need to know whether consciousness is purely *passive* or whether it plays an *active* role.

Certainly, philosophy in general and moral philosophy in particular can be greatly strengthened by the insights generated in the scientific field concerning nature and human nature. The greatest philosophers since Aristotle have built their arguments on the knowledge yielded by science. The problem is that there is a clear sense in which scientists are succumbing to the temptation to see the advances being made in their own fields as leaving all other disciplines behind, thus ignoring the need to make contact altogether. Having emancipated science from religious controls, it seems that many scientists are asserting a muscular attitude to all other disciplines. All, it seems, should bow their heads to scientific knowledge. This is the point where means come to be enlarged to the status of ends and the world of fact is comes to be extended to cover the world of values. Earlier, I quoted Jacob Bronowski in *The Ascent of Man* denying the responsibility of science for the ills of the twentieth century. Not science, he asserted, but arrogance, ignorance and dogma. Bronowski is correct, although his view does beg the question of wider social and institutional relations – if science can avoid responsibility for the bad uses of science, pointing to politics, it follows that it is politics, how human beings organise their powers, that must be responsible for the good. But wherever there is human folly, death and destruction, there will be some combination of arrogance, ignorance and dogma. It is Bronowski's implication that scientists are not guilty on these counts that can be challenged. It is not difficult to find many examples of arrogance, ignorance and dogma in the claims made by many leading contemporary scientists. The first page of the first chapter of Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* contains this passage:

'We no longer have to resort to superstition when faced with the deep problems: Is there a meaning to life? What are we for? What is man? After posing the last of these questions, the eminent zoologist G. G. Simpson put it thus: 'The point I want to make now is that all attempts to answer that question before 1859 are worthless and that we will be better off if we ignore them completely.'

Dawkins 2006: 1

The explanation for Dawkins' remarkable ignorance of theology and philosophy is contained in this passage. There is no other way of describing this passage and the

claims made in it other than arrogant and ignorant. It reads like Dawkins' attempt to match the breathtaking genius of Wittgenstein, who similarly told his students not to read the books of the philosophers but instead to philosophise. Richard Dawkins is no Wittgenstein and what he offers on the meaning of life and human nature is quite risible, beyond the mere mechanics, that is.

The assertion that the whole of human thought on questions of the meaning of life amounts to nothing more than superstition can only be based on wilful ignorance. The view that the arguments of philosophers before Darwin are 'worthless' is simply staggering in its crudity. It could have been designed to provoke controversy. It just makes me mistrust Dawkins' judgement. Think about some of the names that this dismissal applies to – Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Marx. These names will be remembered long after Dawkins has been relegated to a footnote. One would have thought that the history of social Darwinism in politics in the first half of the twentieth century would have taught scientists, however 'eminent' *in their own fields*, to acknowledge that the questions 'is there a meaning to life?', 'what are we for?' and 'what is man?' involve much more than biological fact. To state the point clearly, no society organised around the Kantian respect for all human beings as ends in themselves and not merely as means would have degenerated to such an extent that eugenics became a moral imperative in influential circles. And to take a cheap shot against contemporary neo-Darwinians, it would be interesting to know just which aspects of Darwin Hitler distorted in *Mein Kampf*, because Darwin's influence is felt on every page and it is less than clear what Hitler got wrong, *if certain arguments and attitudes are extrapolated and pursued to a ruthless conclusion*. The point is that once moral controls are lowered or even removed as 'superstition', there is nothing but power to decide moral issues. That road leads to a wasteland, the very wasteland that Nietzsche's philosophy points to as a world beyond morality.

Dawkins continues that 'Philosophy and the subjects known as 'humanities' are still taught almost as if Darwin had never lived.' That claim is so general as to be worthless. Not in my experience. In the Introduction to the 30th Anniversary edition of *The Selfish Gene* Dawkins is his usual waspish self. He is good with the snotty put-down: 'Many critics, especially vociferous ones learned in philosophy as I have discovered, prefer to read a book by title only.' OK, 'the selfish gene' doesn't mean that the gene is a

person and that selfish gene offers the moral foundation for selfishness in human society. And selfish doesn't necessarily mean nasty, aggressive, mean behaviour but could entail altruism. We understand that. But as Shakespeare wrote, 'the lady doth protest too much'. Even as metaphor, the selfish gene does chime rather too neatly with the aggressive egoism of neo-liberalism in politics and economics to be as innocent as Dawkins alleges.

But Dawkins himself has form in this area. For those who like their argumentation tinged with a little irony, Dawkins' scathing attack on Lovelock's Gaia as requiring foresight and planning came in his book *The Extended Phenotype* (1982), a book which promotes the idea that genes, the basic unit of natural selection, have an influence beyond the confines of the organism which they are part of. Dawkins' thought applies on a much smaller scale than Lovelock's. 'The farthest action at a distance I can think of,' Dawkins argues, 'is a matter of several miles, the distance separating the extreme margins of a beaver lake from the genes for whose survival it is an adaptation,' since 'A gene in a beaver which ... causes a larger lake to come into existence, can directly benefit itself by means of its lake. [Genes] causing smaller lakes are less likely to survive.'

This is real science, whereas Dawkins dismisses Lovelock's Gaia as part of 'the pop-ecology literature'. Lovelock refused to engage in polemic and instead returned to the scientific point at issue. Lovelock addressed these criticisms and rebutted the bulk of them, particularly in *The Ages of Gaia* (1988). It isn't the specific criticisms of Lovelock's Gaia that are important – actually Gaia easily fits the explanation by natural selection and, indeed, the thesis is strengthened by the explanation – so much as the manner by which Dawkins expressed them.

For all of Dawkins' snotty put down of the philosophers, he has himself long since ceased to be a scientist. Dawkins writes books on science and is very much part of the 'pop-science literature' he derided with respect to Lovelock.

In terms of the science, Lovelock was concerned to establish the way Gaia regulates temperature and the way Gaia controls the chemical environment in a more robust fashion. Dawkins could not see how Gaia 'could evolve her global adaptations by the ordinary processes of Darwinian selection acting within the one

planet'. Since everything on Earth is connected to everything else, this seemed an impossible puzzle to tackle in the real world. Dawkins argued: 'I very much doubt that a model of such a selection process could be made to work.' Lovelock set out to prove him wrong. To this end, Lovelock devised a computer programme, Daisyworld, a system which combines positive and negative feedback. When the world is cold, dark daisies do better in a positive feedback until the temperature increases; but then dark daisies warm their surroundings above the critical temperature and start to wilt, thus reducing the temperature so that the hotter it gets, the less they are favoured, in a negative feedback. The crucial point to grasp about this is that the actions of each and every single daisy at every stage proceeds in accordance with Dawkins' doctrine of the selfish gene. *But of course, genes are not literally selfish.* This is Dawkins' metaphor. Dawkins accuses his critics, 'especially vociferous ones learned in philosophy', of failing to see that he uses the term 'selfish' metaphorically. Lovelock's most cutting response to Dawkins is that 'Gaia is alive in the same way that genes are selfish.' Dawkins, in other words, had committed the very same error he accuses (unnamed) philosophers of committing.

The point of this detour into the Dawkins-Lovelock spat is to emphasise the extent to which scientists are as guilty of arrogance, ignorance and dogma as anyone else. Dawkins contributes a chapter to Ben Rogers's book *Is Nothing Sacred?*, arguing that whilst certain experiences do provoke feelings of awe in him that could be taken by some for a kind of religious experience, he sees it as due to a poetic imagination which in turn is a manifestation of human nature. This may be fine as it stands. But Dawkins displays little or no respect for disciplines other than his own, going on to claim that at some point soon all such feelings will be subject to biological explanation: 'As scientists, and biological scientists, it's up to us to explain [feelings of awe], and I expect that one day we shall.' It is in this certainty that biological explanation is possible, complete rather than partial, that Dawkins reveals his *hubris*. There is no recognition in this *scientism* of the validity of insights into the human condition from other spheres of human endeavour, whether this be the poetry of a man like Blake, the music of a man like Beethoven or the philosophy of a man like Kant. There is no recognition at all that disciplines other than science can generate anything that may be dignified by the term human knowledge. One returns here to the word 'superstition' which Dawkins applies to all human thought before Darwin. According to this, all

explanations of meaning, knowledge, the sacred are or will be subsumed within the meta-narrative of Darwinian biology. Such ideological overconfidence can certainly be described as *hubris*. The failure to respect other modes of human knowledge and understanding will lead to morally and philosophically illiterate wastelands and cul-de-sacs.

To take an obvious point, just what is the status of Darwin's own work once it is reduced to the physical explanations of Darwinian biology? The commitment to truth is a moral commitment which science itself can neither found nor justify. Dawkins' failure to appreciate this point leads him to engage in a phoney science-religion war which could very easily rebound spectacularly on him, on science and reason and on as a result on the rest of us. Extremes breed extremes. Without a supporting moral foundation, we cannot rely on universal respect for the commitment to truth. Dawkins' hubristic way of proceeding leaves science morally and philosophically vulnerable. No-one is obliged to accept scientific truth as such, least of all Richard Dawkins' version of it. That commitment can only be supported with a moral argument. Yet, with words like 'superstition', Dawkins seems unable to treat morality, as distinct from biologically explained nature, with any respect or validity.

James Lovelock himself takes a scientific view in justifying his own agnosticism. 'I am a scientist and do not have faith, but neither am I the counterpart of those with faith, an atheist.' Significantly, he argues that it 'takes a lot of hubris to imagine that we can ever reach the limits of our own intelligence; to think that we will ever be able to explain everything about the universe is absurd. For these reasons I am equally discomforted by religious faith and scientific atheism.' (Lovelock *The Ages of Gaia* 2000:194/5).

That is a warning against certainty and emphasises the need to keep thinking about life, human beings and meaning in ways which respect the intellectual, moral and psychic complexities and depths of these questions. The idea that one approach or one discipline, emphasising only fact and explanation within even those narrow limits, suffices in this human quest for meaning is plainly ridiculous. Dawkins is free to pursue that biological reductionism. On balance, with a knowledge of the range of human knowledge and understanding *before Darwin*, what Dawkins dismisses as an age of 'worthless' 'superstition', I would guess that more insight and meaning will be found in

the works of William Shakespeare than in the whole opus of contemporary neo-Darwinians.

James Lovelock expresses this sense that human beings are more than physiological processes. 'I respect the intuition of those who do believe, and I am moved by the ceremony, the music, and most of all by the glory of the words of the prayer book that to me are the nearest to perfect expression of our language. When atheistic science can inspire anything as moving as Bach's St Matthew passion or as seemly as Salisbury Cathedral I will respect it but not be part of it.' (*The Ages of Gaia* 2000 ch 9 on God and Gaia).

It's called culture, the thing that human beings create out of and do with their biological equipment, embodying and expressing the ideas and values that human beings live by and die by. This is the real issue with the biological determinists and reductionists - the narrowness of their approach ensures that scientific knowledge does not punch its true weight when it comes to the human good. The human world is infused with meaning and beliefs, ideas and values. It makes sense that these should be grounded in human nature so as to ensure human flourishing, as against disabling and destructive illusions and distortions. But this is very different to the conquest and colonisation proposed by some scientists.

E.O. Wilson, a scientist whom I rate very highly, has gone much further in this respect than Richard Dawkins. Wilson speaks for an increasing number of scientists when he argues that the neurologists should replace the moralists, philosophers and politicians.

Wilson begins reasonably enough: 'What... made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths' (1975: 3). But this merely introduces the central idea that 'Scientists and humanists should consider together the suggestion that the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologized' (Wilson, Edward O. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1975:562).

My blood runs cold at such language. These may seem to be brave words but, in light of the experience of the twentieth century, they are naïve and foolhardy at best. At worst, they are an invitation to moral barbarism. There are many instances which could be cited from the twentieth century where ethics have been removed from the philosophers and biologicized in the hands of political and scientific elites. As recently as the late 1960's poor black women in the USA were still being forcibly sterilized. The Nazi programmes of euthanasia, eugenics and human experimentation show just what can happen when ethics comes to be removed from the hands of those who know what moral questioning and reasoning involves and is placed in the hands of those who know only the world of fact and nothing of the world of value. The remarkable thing is just how blindly scientists can walk into this moral wasteland, as though history is just something that happened to other people.

Wilson's claims are extraordinary:

The transition from purely phenomenological to fundamental theory in sociobiology must await a full, neuronal explanation of the human brain. Only when the machinery can be torn down on paper at the level of the cell and put together again will the properties of emotion and ethical judgment come clear. Simulations can then be employed to estimate the full range of behavioral responses and the precision of their homeostatic controls. Stress will be evaluated in terms of the neurophysiological perturbations and their relaxation times. Cognition will be translated into circuitry. Learning and creativeness will be defined as the alteration of specific portions of the cognitive machinery regulated by input from the emotive centers. Having cannibalized psychology, the new neurobiology will yield an enduring set of first principles for sociology.

Wilson 1975:575

At risk of stating the obvious, a full, neuronal explanation of the human brain establishes first principles for neither psychology nor sociology, only neuroscience. A neuronal explanation of the brain explains nothing about how individuals – a fully functioning human being as actor, creator, thinker in relation

to other such human beings – live their lives, act, create, think, in contexts, cultures and networks of social relations, interactions, solidary exchanges and so on. The only thing that Wilson's neuronal determinism will cannibalize is humanity itself, reducing it to physical existence without the meaning added by creative human agency.

Frankly, such claims read like a teenage boy's fantasy. In this respect, the argument of fertility expert Robert Winston in *The Story of God* is pertinent. Winston, a biologist who is also a practising Jew, notes that biologists display much greater confidence about the scope of their science than physicists. The difference lies in biologists' belief that they have it 'all wrapped up'. Physics has had its spells of hubristic brio and has since undergone a process of reassessment, learning to be more cautious in the claims it makes. Biology, especially in its more youthful neo-Darwinian form, is buoyed by its easy victories against religion and is much less circumspect when it comes to the history of science. Yet Winston points out that biologists don't have it all wrapped up at all, and that biology still has a long way to go.

The reasons why the claims made by Dawkins and Wilson et al for biology read as so much teenage fantasy are actually quite simple and easily understood *by all who respect genuine ethics and philosophy*, that is values as distinct from facts. As any doctor of medicine could tell you, you cannot *explain* any specific example of human behaviour by digging into the body of the behaving person, unless the attempt to explain that behaviour has reached the point where that particular physical information is called for.

The fallacious nature of the reasoning employed by biological and neurological determinists and reductionists is easily exposed by those with a modicum of philosophical training and acumen. Wilson talks about cannibalising psychology and sociology, ethics and philosophy. Fine. But what about biology? To see how such an approach easily turns in against itself and eats itself, read through Wilson's arguments and substitute the words biology and biological for ethics, philosophy, psychology and sociology. Biology is a branch of human thought like the others, no more and no less, and, just like the others, requires the

operation of specific parts of the brain. These operations and parts are subject to the same neuronal explanation supplying first principles. Biology no more escapes this explanation than do any of the other disciplines. Indeed, the evidence for these parts and operations being genetically determined is much clearer with respect to scientific subjects than to social sciences and humanities, since the field is more technical and fact based and less reliant on subjective views, values and experience. These capacities owe nothing to background and environment – take the examples of child prodigies in the sciences – and are therefore the result of natural selection. That is precisely the same reasoning applied to ethics, psychology, sociology. But the whole reasoning is based on an obvious *non sequitur*, in that the conclusion does not follow from the premise. It does not follow that *the* way to "explain" biology — the "fundamental" way based on 'first principles' — is to dissect the brain and observe the neurons and neural networks.

To put the point succinctly, to the extent that a neurologist 'explains' away everybody else's thoughts and actions, so too is his own thought and action explained away. Neuro-reductionism and determinism is a double-edged sword that can be turned against the neurologist and neuroscience. That circularity is the reason why neuro-science is not a morality and can never substitute for morality. Just as an 'ought-to-be' cannot be derived from an 'is', and an ethic cannot be derived from nature, values from facts, so physiological or physical explanation – whether of human brains and biology or of the workings of the universe – cannot form the 'first principles' of an ethical system. Whilst fact can come to inform value, it can never cannibalise it and replace it. Overcoming the dualism of the 'is' and the 'ought-to-be' implies the merging of fact and value, not the extension of the former to the detriment of the latter. Ethics remains ethics and can never be biology without ceasing to be.

Wilson doesn't see the fine distinction. In Wilson's terms, neurology is like ethics in being a branch of human thought which can affect conduct but which can be subject by explanation of neural connections. There is no doubt that some operations are going on in the brain of the neurologist which are no less interesting than those of our philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. And if,

as Crick and Blackmore argue, the world is merely an illusion, the result of neural projections upon inanimate matter, then the neurologist is no less deluded than our philosophers, sociologists et al. So, if neurology is going to replace ethics and supply first principles for psychology and sociology, then surely what we really need is an explanation of neurology. We need not study what the neurologist thinks he or she is doing, since neurologists are as subject to the illusions projected by neural operations as the rest of us, and instead do to the neurologist what s/he proposes to do to the rest of us – reduce human thought and action to the physiological basics.

Frankly, the whole argument ends up looking like a pancake, it's the same whichever way you flip it. Once neurology and biology have taken the place of ethics and politics, we can continue the search for 'first principles' by seeking to explain neurology and neurologists 'at all depths'. Only that what results is reductionist and determinist biology and neurology, not a genuine ethics and politics.

The study of neural pathways and networks is certainly important in furthering our understanding of the human brain, that is not what is being denied here. Indeed, I have argued that advances in this direction promise to give a strong biological foundation to the ancient goal of creating a *politikon bion* in which each and all may flourish. Further, neuro-science will shed new light on the psychology of human thought and action — the causal relations at work in human intelligence, particularly in relation to environment and experience. None of this is what is being disputed. On the contrary, such knowledge is to be welcomed as part of the quest to understand human nature and ensure the creation of a *eudaimonistic* habitat that corresponds to and enhances the human ontology rather than contradicting and inhibiting it. So far so good. But this is not what neuro-determinism and reductionism entails, quite the contrary. It is the failure to respect the moral aspect of human nature, reason with its moral component, that is being contested here. The moral blindspot is a weakness that is an invitation to some future social and political disaster.

The point is that there is no way in which the explanation of neural networks of the human brain can be made into an explanation of the many forms of human thought and action, whether disciplines like biology and sociology or some political programme in government. Understanding any discipline in the natural and social sciences and humanities entails, in the first instance, an ability and an aptitude to engage in the kind of reasoning required. A mathematician has to be able to *do* mathematics. Further, it involves an ability to grasp the standards that govern the particular discipline. It also requires an ability to relate these standards to other standards of thought, to work out the place of any particular discipline in wider life.

Anyone with any depth of learning in philosophy will respect words like ‘first principles’ and ‘fundamental’ and will recall the years of work and brain power that the greatest thinkers put into towering intellectual and moral edifices, systems that built civilisations. Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas and the Schoolmen, the great Victorian thinkers, including Darwin no less, and myriad others, respected first principles and knew that such principles are never cheaply bought. This reveals the shallowness of the contemporary neural determinism, with Dawkins so casually assuming that all the great questions of human life and meaning will be subject to biological explanation, Wilson asserting that the great disciplines which have created, ordered and sustained civilisations are somehow less fundamental than the physiological explanation of the brain.

To state what is entailed by a balanced approach simply, each field and inquiry has its own purposes, and these determine which particular questions are appropriate. Any ‘first principles’ required in any area are relevant insofar as they yield the kind of explanation which those questions demand. For instance, the field of hermeneutics requires first principles appropriate to the study of human interpretation and social behaviour, interaction, communication. Supplying that foundation may draw upon findings in the field of neuro-biology, but will absorb neuro-biology into hermeneutics rather than become neuro-biology. Little is to be gained and plenty lost from extending methods appropriate to one particular discipline to other disciplines where they are not appropriate.

To make this point even clearer, substitute any discipline from poetry and literature to geography and consider just how much relevant knowledge neurological explanation would yield as a result. Of course, we wouldn't have art or politics or economics at all, just neurology or biology masquerading as art, politics, economics.

The problem is not merely academic, either. Ethics is a branch of systematic thinking which has practical consequences as morality. Societies and civilisations are ordered around values, norms, morals and are affected for good or ill whenever these are challenged, criticised, changed. In fine, supposedly value-neutral science is never politically innocent and socially benign.

This is not a territorial war over ethics. The criticisms of neurology and biology is not a hands-off warning which puts an exclusion zone around moral philosophy. Ethics is neither the possession of philosophers nor of biologists and neurologists. At the same time, ethics is not biology or neurology. Both Dawkins and Wilson advance arguments which denigrate past ethics and exalt the claims of science to answer the crucial questions of the meaning of life, what human beings are and ought-to-be over other 'worthless' disciplines. That is the kind of territorial claim that genuine philosophising resists and challenges. Philosophy, mediating between science and religion, draws upon both knowledge and belief to generate wisdom. In other words, philosophy, religion and biology are not involved in some zero-sum game in which the victory of the one entails the defeat of the other; rather, these are all different aspects of the one inquiry.

It is in this respect that Wilson's ambition to 'biologize ethics' is vacuous, empty of meaning and relevance, redundant. An ethics which draws upon biology remains ethics; a better, more informed, more robust ethics, but ethics all the same. Wilson's call makes sense not as a 'biologized ethics' but as the perfectly reasonable demand that ethics be informed by what the latest and best scientific knowledge reveals about nature and human nature. How, exactly, is that controversial and how, exactly, is that new? Aristotle was a biologist, one of the greatest pioneers of biology. Whilst he got plenty wrong, he got plenty right. Aristotle was the first to define whales as mammals rather than fish. It took hundreds of years, even a thousand and more, for his errors to be exposed. Beyond Aristotle, philosophers have continually built their systems and theories on conceptions of

human nature. Wilson's apparent antithesis between philosophy and biology is remarkable only for its failure to understand just how venerable the connection is. Of course, if we take Dawkins' line, all philosophical systems before Darwin have been built upon 'worthless' foundations. Yet I cannot help feeling that Aristotle is going to be around a whole lot longer than Richard Dawkins.

Be that as it may, there is a clear sense in which Dawkins and other scientists think as scientists when they easily dismiss philosophy. Science is littered with failed and falsified theories, that is the nature of science. But in philosophy, faulty conceptions of human nature – Hobbes? Locke? Rousseau? Descartes? – do not falsify any particular philosophy the same way as in science. We can always return to the greatest philosophers and learn from the way that they frame questions, pursue various lines of inquiry, and reason things through, *in light of new scientific or biological knowledge*. The mistaken answers of philosophers remain fertile in consequence of being given in response to the right question.

The point is that incorporating the latest neurology and biology does not necessitate 'removing ethics from the hands of the philosophers' but being philosophical and coming to philosophize as well as one can with respect to the range of intellectual and moral resources at one's disposal. Certainly, philosophers need to assimilate biological and neurological facts into moral argument. But, this does not make philosophy obsolete, no more than past scientific discoveries rendered philosophy redundant. It's all grist to the philosophical mill, always has been and always will be. There is no avoiding the philosophical imperative. Science cannot replace philosophy and cannot constitute an ethics. It lies on the wrong side of the fact/value divide for it to ever succeed in those overweening ambitions. To proceed with the attempt to any great extent may simply reduce the world to the flatlands of quantity, fact, objects and things, physical processes, all devoid of meaning.

The mediating term between science and religion, philosophy is required to sort out concepts and organize them into viable systems of thought. The relation between neurological and biological facts and meaning of life questions about how human beings ought to act is nowhere near as simple as scientists assume. Certainly,

concepts like nature, right, duty, choice, freedom, motive, and creativity need to be analyzed, defined, sharpened, clarified. Neurologists and biologists contribute to this philosophical task, but this is philosophy, not neurology or biology. The more that neurologists and biologists contribute to this work of framing questions and clarifying concepts, the more they are engaging in philosophy. To repeat a point made earlier, every field of human activity can be subject to the fundamental questioning which defines philosophy. There can be a philosophy of anything – education, religion, law, medicine, art, and science. Philosophy involves the sorting and defining of fundamental concepts, principles, and methods. It is no coincidence that whatever field we are talking about – law, education, medicine – it's best practitioners field are interested in its philosophy. All significant and original neurological and biological thinking involves philosophizing to a significant extent. The assertions of Wilson and Dawkins can be turned against them with a call for a philosophised biology and neurology. Philosophy is required in these areas because moral as well as conceptual difficulties are so complex and because tangles and errors in these areas have practical consequences. Philosophy is the way by which these problems are resolved in an intellectually and morally coherent and cogent way. This can be done by a biologist or a neurologist, but only in the role of a philosopher and not as a biologist and neurologist and nothing more.

26 SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-CREATION

'Know thyself!' read the inscription at the Oracle of Delphi. But Spinoza's notion of power raises questions of knowledge as self-knowledge. Is self-knowledge limited to our awareness of our role within a larger self-regulating organism? But what of self-knowledge as connected to creation as self-creation? What if Spinoza's God/Nature is a human artefact, the product of reason and labour? Think back to Plato and his notion of innate concepts. Kant refers to the innate cognitive capacity of human beings which give shape to the external world. The world the mind apprehends is already in large part infused with human form.

Reference was made earlier to the American physicist Frank Tipler and his concern to unify physics and theology: 'People talk of God as the creator of life. But maybe the purpose of life is to create God.' Tipler argues that the stated aim of

physics is to describe the Universe in its entirety. 'If it is to succeed in this task, clearly it must also describe any Supreme Being living in the Universe. It therefore follows that theology must eventually be shown to be a branch of physics.'

Which begs the question of how life, how human beings as conscious actors in the evolution of life on earth, could participate in the creation of this Supreme Being. Does Spinoza's intellectual love of God/Nature point to an active role of consciousness in somehow creating that divine/natural substance? There is a vast and significant philosophical tradition which conceives the world around us, the human world, to be a human creation. This switches the focus from philosophy as a passive intellectual appreciation of a given substance to a praxis oriented philosophy in which the object to be apprehended is infused with human subjectivity. Human beings can understand this divine/natural substance because it is in some way constituted by human praxis.

This view of creative human agency requires an examination of how the human mind creates the world around us. This raises the question of the Creation and the Creator. God did not create life, it is the purpose of life to create God. Which returns us to the American physicist Frank Tipler and his view that 'People talk of God as the creator of life. But maybe the purpose of life is to create God.' In making this claim, Tipler is stretching physics way beyond its widely accepted boundaries and striking deep into the territory of theology. Scientists think it is important to draw a line in the sand between what is science - the possibility of life surviving for ever at the Omega Point - and what is theological speculation. Tipler, however, makes no apology for his claim. He points out that the stated aim of physics is to describe the Universe in its entirety. 'If it is to succeed in this task, clearly it must also describe any Supreme Being living in the Universe,' he says. 'It therefore follows that theology must eventually be shown to be a branch of physics.'

My view is that a praxis philosophy can make sense of Tipler's notion of life creating God. Proceeding from Vico's *verum ipsum factum*, I shall take Kant, Hegel and Marx in turn.

The view is that reality is a human creation; knowledge of the world is therefore also self-knowledge. Knowing thyself is a condition of us knowing the world we have created around us.

How is this possible? Let's start with Vico and the principle *verum ipsum factum*. This states that to know the truth of something it is necessary to have made it. This is an epistemological claim that affirms the identity of the true with what is made or done.

The central epistemological thesis of Vico's 'new science' is the identity of the true with what is made or done, that is, with that which owes its very being to having been made. This is the *verum-factum* concept – that the truth of something is conditional upon having made it. Now, making is an activity and, as such, requires a subject. The world of history is the world of human beings and therefore a human creation. The state and politics, trade and commerce, war and peace, etc are all the product of creative human agency; the world of nature is the province of God.

Creating is an activity and that it thus logically requires a creator. Human agency is the creator, the human world is the creation.

28 KANT – THE LIMITS OF REASON

Kant argues that certain features of experience, including space, time and causality, are not in themselves features of the external world, but are the ways in which the mind organizes its experiences. This is a revolutionary way of looking at the theory of knowledge and at metaphysics because it shows the active role of human agency in bringing about the world we see around us. However, Kant sought to describe exactly what can be said by reason and what cannot.

Kant distinguishes between the world of *phenomena*, the apparent world, and the world of *noumena*, the unknown and unknowable 'thing in itself'. We can know things in the world of phenomena but we cannot know things in themselves in the world of noumena.

This distinction provides Kant with a rational foundation for religion. Kant saw the noumenal world as evidence for the existence of God - because it is unknown.

There is no equating knowledge and power with notions of God. Rather, human agency creates the phenomenal world, but not the noumenal.

Kant writes that he ‘found it necessary to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**’ (B xx). Kant’s point is that whilst knowledge of the existence of God and our own freedom and immortality cannot be theoretically demonstrated, neither can they be disproven. They are necessary presuppositions of moral conduct — objects of moral belief or faith rather than knowledge. Which is why *intellectual* criticisms on faith and belief succeed only in undermining *rational* arguments for the existence of God but do not touch faith and belief as such. The cosmological argument for the existence of God, the ontological argument, the argument from design, Aquinas’ five proofs may or may not be rationally satisfying. Dawkins has some fun with Aquinas here:

Dawkins quotes Aquinas and the argument from degree.

Humans can be both good and bad, so the maximum goodness cannot rest in us. Therefore there must be some other maximum to set the standard for perfection, and we call that maximum God.

That's an argument? You might as well say, people vary in smelliness but we can make the comparison only by reference to a perfect maximum of conceivable smelliness. Therefore there must exist a pre-eminently peerless stinker, and we call him God. Or substitute any dimension of comparison you like, and derive an equivalently fatuous conclusion.

Dawkins 2006 ch 3

Fatuous? Aquinas’ argument savours more than a little of Plato’s ideal forms. And the argument that all things are particular approximations of the one universal thing is perfectly reasonable. As has been seen earlier, the argument does make sense, although, as Dawkins’ way of putting it makes clear, the result might not be

the idealistic God somehow apart from nature and all natural processes that traditional religion likes to imagine. Is form outside of matter, as Plato argued, or does form inhere in matter, as Aristotle argued? Mathematics or biology – the debate rages on.

Dawkins' argument in the Introduction to *The Selfish Gene* bears repetition here: 'Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to *teach* generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish.' Dawkins knows, then, that human beings 'can be both good and bad'. Dawkins claims that his ideal of the common good, based upon teaching generosity and altruism, can expect little help from biological nature. Which begs the question from where this ideal can be drawn. Dawkins' 'little help from biological nature' actually leaves his society of the common good – presuming he means it – far more detached, supernatural and abstract than anything proposed by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas.

Dawkins, in his haste to ridicule Aquinas misses a trick. As an evolutionary biologist, Dawkins could have broadened Aquinas' standard of perfection beyond notions of higher and lower forms to embrace Nature in its whole diversity. Some such notion would fit Spinoza's self-functioning *Deus sive Natura*. And it can be found in William Blake. The Worm in *The Book of Thel* embodies Blake's belief that 'God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes; for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak.' 'Every thing that lives Lives not alone nor for itself.'

I shall leave this now and return to the main argument. As Kant long ago made clear, the proofs for the existence of God *are* inadequate and are bound to be inadequate. And irrelevant. These are matters of faith and belief, not reason. But they are arational or non-rational rather than irrational.

It is worth spending some time on the science-religion clash with respect to Galileo here. Galileo is a scientific martyr, a scientist who was persecuted and punished by the forces of ignorance and superstition for his commitment to the cause of truth. Get it? Science = truth and enlightenment, religion = ignorance and superstition (and persecution, torture and murder to boot).

This view is an extremely old one and doesn't fit the facts of Galileo's relation to the church and religion. The issue was not one of knowledge and truth versus ignorance and superstition at all. The Church's concern throughout history has been to ensure that scientific advance goes hand in hand with moral advance – that our intellectual and technical capacities do not outstrip our moral and political capacities. The claim is that where an imbalance occurs the consequences could very well be disastrous.

Concern with this imbalance is not the preserve of the Church, of course. The sociologist Karl Mannheim writes of the 'disproportion in the development of human capacities', something which refers to the extent to which technological and natural scientific knowledge comes to advance beyond moral powers and insight into the working of social forces. The argument *is not* to restrain the advance of science and technology but to call for a balance in all the human powers so that one domain – moral, political, artistic, scientific etc – does not so eclipse the others to the detriment of the whole of human life. An outrageous infringement on the freedom of science comes the reaction against the attempt to balance human powers. But it does not follow that what can be done *must* be done regardless of social and cultural effect. Mannheim draws attention to the damaging and destructive effects of imbalance in human capacities: 'If such an unevenness in total development is dangerous for the individual, in society it must sooner or later lead to a catastrophe' (Mannheim 1980 Pt 1 ch 1). Read the history of the twentieth century and make an effort to see why Mannheim is right on this point. We know the arguments in favour of scientific advance – health and medicine, improvements in environmental quality, people living longer and healthier lives etc. These are not in doubt. The point relates to the power that scientific and technological places in the hands of institutions and individuals whose morals and politics are back in the Stone Age. That's not the fault of science, comes the reply. Indeed, it isn't. It is indeed time for our institutions to catch up. But that has to be a learning process that takes time. Thus Mannheim argues that 'the contemporary social order must collapse if rational social control and the individual's mastery over his own impulses do not keep step with technological development. (Mannheim 1980 Pt 1 ch 1).

Which is to argue that the Church had a point in trying to ensure that the work of the astronomers made moral sense. This sounds ridiculous from a scientific perspective which does not take morality seriously, but science is not the whole of the world, certainly not of the human world. Most people are not scientists. For most people, the sun rises and the sun sets. Their vision is earth-bound, geocentric rather than heliocentric. From a scientific perspective, the sun doesn't rise and the sun doesn't set. To know this and to be able to demonstrate this is the value of science. Richard Dawkins cites embryologist Lewis Wolpert's view in *The Unnatural Nature of Science* (1992), that science is difficult because it is more or less systematically counter-intuitive. What seems to be true, often isn't true and the value of science is to show this and explain this – the world is not flat, objects are not stationary until moved but in motion until stopped, the sun does not rise and does not set.

More profoundly difficult are the conclusions of quantum theory, overwhelmingly supported by experimental evidence to a stupefyingly convincing number of decimal places, yet so alien to the evolved human mind that even professional physicists don't understand them in their intuitive thoughts. It seems to be not just our intuitive statistics but our very minds themselves that are back in the stone age.

Dawkins 2006 ch 7

Dawkins writes well but, in the process, reveals precisely why science cannot rule the world, cannot constitute a way of life or social order. It is too difficult and runs too much against our 'stone age minds'. Science is integral in leading us up the ascent to wisdom, but it cannot get us up that ladder unaided. The great risk of the imbalance between technical and moral powers is that institutions and individuals with Stone Age mentalities and emotions come to acquire high-tech powers that they are incapable of using creatively. History is a learning curve, but scientific and technological advance short circuits the whole process when it runs so far ahead of other domains that it is impossible to catch up. Advance has to be built into human social practices. The problem with the game of catch-up is that those left behind seldom catch up. The frontiers are always moving on.

Galileo's crime was to have argued that science is the sole means of discerning truth. In other words, the case against Galileo was not a case against science as such but against hubris. The claim was that science alone, and to the exclusion of all other domains of human insight and knowledge, could discern truth. The conflict tends to be presented in terms of a simplistic clash of knowledge versus ignorance, enlightenment versus superstition. Not so. At issue was something much more profound than that, the attempt to ensure proportion and check disproportion in all the human capacities.

The basic facts are familiar. Galileo Galilei was tried by the Inquisition and forced to recant his teaching. The Church thus stands condemned for its anti-science stance. However, strictly speaking, the conflict was not about the science at all, on which there was more agreement than disagreement.

The Copernican view explained that the sun only appears to go round the earth, the appearance being due to the rotation of the earth itself around the sun. The Church made no objection at all here, even declaring that the Copernican system was simpler than the old system and was a much better instrument for making astronomical calculations. Galileo was given the go ahead to teach the mathematical theory, so long as he stressed its instrumental value only. Galileo's crime was to have gone beyond the claim of the superiority of the Copernican system as an *instrument of calculation* to make the claim that the new system represented *a true description of the world*. For both Galileo and the Church, it was this claim that was the all important matter. What this involved became clear a century later in Bishop Berkeley's understanding of Newton's theory of gravity to be a serious competitor to religion. As Popper argues, Berkeley 'was convinced that a decline of religious faith and religious authority would result from the new science if its interpretation by the 'free-thinkers' was correct; for they saw in its success a proof of *the power of the human intellect, unaided by divine revelation, to uncover the secrets of our world*—the reality hidden behind its appearance' (Popper 1972 ch 3).

It is not so much that it is wrong to reveal the reality of the world which lies behind its appearance. This has been the goal of philosophers, scientists, mystics, sages, artists, theologians, musicians, poets throughout the ages. Beginning with Socrates and Plato, I have argued this as the central theme of philosophy. What does

cause unease is the claim that the power of the human intellect is crystallised in science alone, something which devalues the claims, contributions and insights of all the other domains of human culture and learning. Of course, what discomfited the Church most of all was the fact that its monopolistic claims were being challenged and ended, but that's another point.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant brought this controversy between science and religion to a conclusion which both sides could live with. Kant is a towering figure in the development of philosophy. A university professor, Kant spent his entire life in Königsberg in East Prussia, which he never left once. Kant is the philosopher's philosopher in that his work and his life makes clear the extent to which philosophers consider the inner landscape to be a much more interesting terrain for exploration than the outer landscape. They say travel broadens the mind. Kant's mind travelled all over, even as his body stayed in one place. An idiot can go round the world several times, but still come back an idiot.

Kant's key argument is that the various features of experience, including space, time and causality, are not in themselves features of the external world, but are things which the mind imposes on experience. With this argument, Kant transformed the way of looking at epistemology and metaphysics. For instance, we say that time is passing whenever we see a sequence of things, with one thing following another. This seems obvious. We can easily grasp the sequence of things. However, where is the time? Is time something that exists 'out there' to be seen? For Kant, time is part of our mental apparatus, an example of the ways in which the mind organizes its experiences.

For Kant, all scientific and moral judgements are imposed by the mind on the world. This imposition on the part of our mental apparatus is the only way that we are able to apprehend the things of the world. By this Kant does not mean that these things do not exist independently of the mind. Of course they do. Kant's point is that things in themselves are beyond mind and hence cannot be known. He therefore makes a distinction between the world of *phenomena*, the apparent world, and the world of *noumena*, the unknown and unknowable world of the thing in itself. Kant's philosophy is therefore a transcendental idealism, which means that whilst the

noumenal world can be inferred from reason, it is itself another order of being. Throughout his various *Critiques*, Kant went to painstaking lengths to indicate in precise terms what can and what cannot be said by reason. By establishing the limits of reason, Kant showed just what the power of reason could achieve. Kant's logic didn't impress everyone. Hegel criticised that an enquiry devoted to setting limits to reason presupposes that 'we must know the faculty of knowledge before we can know'. Kant, in other words, presumes what he is setting out to prove.

In the final analysis, Kant took the unknown and unknowable noumenal world to be evidence for the existence of God - because it is unknown and unknowable. One is tempted to mention the Tao here as the unnameable. Which begs the question of just what comprises 'the One' and whether or not human beings are a part of it and what role we play. Human mind plays no active role in the noumenal world of things in themselves – to what extent does human agency relate to divinity?

29 CONCEPTUAL APPARATUS

Let's make sense of this self-knowledge at the individual and the social level.

For Kant, the human mind is not a blank sheet ready to be filled with sense impressions, the particular things of everyday life which our senses perceive all around us. Rather, the human mind possesses basic organising categories or frames of reference which enable us to make sense of these impressions. These categories or frames are 'innate ideas'. We are born with them and they precede any individual human being's experience of life. These categories constitute the core of our faculty of *reason*, which, for Kant, was the central faculty distinguishing human beings as members of the species *homo sapiens*.

This means that our image of the world around us cannot be a mirror image of things as they are in themselves given the way that the human mind imposes its own structures of thought onto the world. The mind cannot do otherwise, for without our own concepts of things we would not be able to understand anything.

To simplify greatly, Kant pointed out that the empiricist account of knowledge was obscure and vague in one crucial respect - in its account of how simple sense

impressions become 'associated' or 'combined' into more complex ideas and concepts. For example, one could see how sense impressions could 'give' one the idea of blue, green, yellow, brown, etc., but how, in themselves, could they ever 'give' one the idea of colour? For there is no sense impression which is 'colour'. Another way of saying this is to argue that sense impressions can yield knowledge of particular nouns, but not of abstract nouns. Moreover, said Kant, there are other even more fundamental concepts for human beings (he mentioned especially the concepts of time and space) which are not derivable by association, contrast, or anything else, from sense impressions.

Kant therefore concluded that the human mind is not a *tabula rasa*, not a blank sheet ready, at birth, to be filled with sense impressions. On the contrary, in order to make sense of - to use - sense impressions, the human mind must *already* at birth be possessed of certain basic organizing categories or frames of reference into which those sense impressions are fitted or through which they are filtered. These organizing categories or frames of reference are often called 'innate ideas', 'innate' because they precede any individual human being's experience of life. Kant is plainly working in the tradition of Plato here, recalling the importance that Plato assigned to innate concepts as the key to being able to apprehend true reality. These innate ideas or concepts come with all human beings 'out of the womb', and are independent of experience. We are born with them, they are part of our heritage as members of the species *homo sapiens*. These categories constitute in fact the core of our faculty of *reason*, which, for Kant, as for Aristotle and as for Marx and as for all working in the rational tradition, is the central faculty distinguishing human beings from all other animals.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that all knowledge requires both input from the senses and organization by concepts. Kant is not therefore opposing the mental apparatus to empirical nature in any crude antithesis. Kant offers much more than a retreat of rationalism versus empiricism in philosophy. What he does argue is that both sensory inputs and organizing concepts have pure forms that we can know *a priori*, and hence know to be universally and necessarily valid. The pure forms of ordinary sensory inputs - what Kant calls empirical intuition - are the structures of space and time studied by mathematics; the pure forms of

ordinary empirical concepts are the pure concepts of the understanding - the categories – and these are what makes it possible to apply the various aspects and forms of judgment studied by logic to objects of experience. Mathematics contains synthetic *a priori* judgments that are universally and necessarily true of all appearances, and must be derived from the construction of mathematical objects in pure intuition rather than from the analysis of concepts; the categories yield synthetic *a priori* principles when applied to experience with its necessarily spatio-temporal structure - the principles of the conservation of substance and of the universality of causation for instance. This is the constructive theory of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The *Critique* also contains a critical theory.

In his *Critiques*, Kant established the limits of reason in order to establish what can be known. The importance of Kant lies in the way that he is able to balance the claims of belief and knowledge, developing a conception of rational faith. Kant's most striking statement in this respect is his claim that faith has priority over knowledge. Hence Kant's confession in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique* that he had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith (B xxx). Kant explained what he meant by this in Section III of Chapter II of the "Dialectic" of the second *Critique*, the section aptly entitled "On the Primacy of Practical Reason." This text bears a close examination.

In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant informs us that the *Critique* is an essential preparation for a proper grounding of morality, even though it will not in itself supply a theory of morality (Bxxv). This will in turn provide the correct, rational foundation for religion. It is at this point that Kant states that he 'found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*' (Bxxx). In a section entitled 'The Canon of Pure Reason', contained in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant concludes his strategy for solving the problem of metaphysics by demonstrating that Critical philosophy is able to bring harmony to reason and thus validate the moral order through its vindication of the metaphysics of experience and criticism of transcendent metaphysics. The Canon therefore outlines the contours of the future development of the Critical system, the architecture of which is built upon three key questions (A804—5/B832-3):

- 1 What can I know?
- 2 What ought I to do?
- 3 What may I hope?

Epistemology, ethics and religion/theology.

Kant presented the concepts of hope and faith as the central theme of the doctrine of the postulates. He states that the doctrine of postulates is concerned with the question, "What may I hope for?" (C1, A 805/B 833). On first impression, the view that it is necessary 'to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith' (C1, B xxx) sets hope and faith in opposition, whereas in fact they are complementary for Kant and constitute a single matter. This faith is a special type of knowledge, common (in principle) to all rational beings. Hope (as *grounded* hope) is the affective response that faith arouses in each individual. Faith and hope are therefore two interrelated aspects of the same awareness. The relation is one-way, from faith to hope, faith being prior to hope both logically and temporally (Yovel 1980 ch 2).

The critical theory of the *Critique* holds that we can use the pure concepts of the understanding to conceive of objects that lie beyond the limits of our sensible intuition through our power of inferential reason. We can, for instance, imagine a spatio-temporal universe that has a kind of completeness that our indefinitely extendable actual intuitions can never have; we can imagine objects that cannot be represented in sensory experience at all, such as God or an immaterial soul. However, such conceptions do not amount to knowledge, and the errors of traditional metaphysics can be attributed to claims that they do. But Kant's point goes further than this denial of claims to knowledge. Kant affirmed a view of human powers which held that none of these powers fails to have a proper use if only we understand it correctly (G, 4:395). Kant is firmly working in the tradition of Plato (see CPuR, A312-20/B369-77), arguing that the ideas of pure reason have a legitimate use, or yield a "canon" (A 795—831 /B 823—59), *but in morality rather than science*. Knowledge of the existence of God, of immortality and of the immaterial soul is impossible; these are incapable of rational theoretical demonstration. That, to both rationalists, would seem to bring the matter to a conclusion. Not so. Knowledge of human freedom is also incapable of theoretical

demonstration. Is that the end of freedom as a value? If so, why do human beings continue to think and act as though human freedom is real, an integral part of Being? Kant's solution is to argue that whilst God, immortality and freedom cannot be theoretically proven, neither can they be disproven. They are objects of moral belief or faith rather than knowledge, necessary presuppositions of moral conduct. Hence Kant's statement that he found it necessary "to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**" (B xx).

As Pascal had understood all along, God is incapable of rational demonstration. One either has faith or one does not. Kant's achievement is to have established the terms on which the legitimate claims of knowledge and faith can be reconciled and science and religion thereby co-exist.

(As to the argument that if the existence of God cannot be proven, then neither can it be disproven, I must mention that my garden is full of invisible pixies who leave no trace. How do I know they are there? How do you know that they are not there? There is a principle of parsimony, deriving from Ockham's razor, which holds that the explanation which makes least assumptions and fits the known facts best is the most plausible.)

30 THE MORAL LAW AS THE UNIVERSAL

For Kant, this combination of constructive and critical argumentation provided an adequate foundation for all of philosophy. Kant's attention now turned from 'transcendental philosophy' to a revision of 'metaphysics' through the application of the synthetic *a priori* principles of experience in the *Critique* to the most elementary concepts of natural science and morality.

However, before Kant could begin the 'Metaphysics of Morals' he had been promising since the 1760s, he saw the need for further foundational work. In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant demonstrated that the fundamental principle of morality can be derived from both the common-sense notion of a good will as the only thing of unconditional value (Section I) and the philosophical conception of a categorical imperative (Section II). Kant proceeded to argue that we must have free will and that any being with free will can act only in accordance with the fundamental principle of morality (Section III).

The categorical imperative is at the very core of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. It is worth giving a full statement of Kant's formulae.

The Formula of Universal Law

'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'.

The Formula of the Law of Nature

'Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.'

The Formula of the End in Itself

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.

The Formula of Autonomy

So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim.

The Formula of the Kingdom of Ends

So act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a kingdom of ends.

Review of the Formulae

A new version is given for the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends.

'All maxims as proceeding from our own making of laws ought to harmonise with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature.'

Kant argued for the existence of God in terms of the moral law planted within each and every individual as a condition of their humanity. In arguing for the coincidence of the freedom of each individual and all individuals, Kant's moral law exists as a universal law.

Now this universal exists in many forms in the history of philosophy. There is the One of Plotinus, the Tao of the Taoists (the law of the immanence of the way). The Hindus refer to Brahman, the purpose of yoga being to connect Atman as the divine within to the Brahman as the divine without. This reveals the essential aspect of metaphysics as concerned with the underlying reality behind all appearance and sense experience.

But Kant is not a mystic. Instead, he firmly bases his universal in reason. There is such a thing as moral truth and it can be clearly shown to be grounded in reason.

The categorical imperative is the form that the fundamental principle of morality assumes when applied to imperfectly rational creatures like human beings. The principle originates in human reason; it is something we impose upon ourselves rather than being something externally imposed upon us by another ruler, divine or human. Nevertheless, despite its origins in human reason, the principle has the character of a constraint given the existence of natural human inclinations which incline us to act contrary to the principle if unrestrained (G, 4:412—14). The categorical imperative requires us to act only on "maxims" or principles of action that can be 'universalized' in the sense that they can be accepted and acted on by all who would be affected by individual actions. Further, principles must be universalizable since every person, ourselves as well as all others, must always be treated as ends and never merely as means (4:429). If everyone respected the principle of universalizability and acted on the categorical imperative in accordance, the result would be a "realm of ends," a "whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may set himself") (4:433). In the realm of ends each person is intrinsically valuable and is treated as such, not as a mere means to the ends of others. This is a realm in which the particular ends set by each person are promoted by all persons to the extent that this can consistently be done.

At the heart of the universal realm delineated by Kant is the "categorical imperative".

An imperative is categorical when expressed as an unconditional demand that possesses its own validity. This yields a universal principle for all rational beings and their acts. Submitting our maxims to the test of universality ensures that the pursuit of

private ends no longer results in conflict but instead generates a harmony of free and rational wills in a 'realm of ends' in which each person is reciprocally end and means.

Kant's categorical imperative in its various formulae requires that we act only on "maxims" or principles of action that can be "universalized," because that is the way to treat every person, always as ends and never merely as means. Thus the formulation demands that the moral agent act always so that the will through its maxims could regard itself at the same time as 'making universal law' (GMM 1991:94).

As distinct from an hypothetical imperative, which indicates the means which must be willed or employed relative to the realisation of some further end (GMM 1991:79), an imperative is categorical when expressed as an unconditional demand that possesses its own validity. This yields a universal principle for all rational beings and valid and necessary principles for every volition. This is The Formula of Universal Law: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (GMM 1991:84).

Kant did not leave his categorical principle as an abstract and formal statement but sought to ground the implementation of the abstract ideal of the realm of ends in lived human reality through an analysis of private property, contract, and family. (Hegel would take this much further in his concept of the *Sittlichkeit*, the system of the ethical life). Kant was concerned to identify the forms of justice required by the realm of ends in the social and political world of human beings. He proceeded to derive the public institutions and private virtues required to maintain these forms of justice to realise ends and hence achieve happiness (see Guyer 2006 ch 1).

Kant's formulae therefore proposes a public and a social ethic, not merely a private ethic concerning individuals alone. Kant's categorical principle is not to be limited to defining a procedure for the pursuit of private ends, achieving happiness only indirectly, since it applies to all so that everyone acts only on maxims that can be willed to become universal laws (Van Der Linden 1988:20). Once maxims are

submitted to the test of universality in this manner the pursuit of private ends no longer issues in conflict but in a harmony of free and rational wills.

The obligation to obey the moral law implies that humanity is charged with the duty to promote the highest good. In submitting their maxims to the test of universality, individual agents are creating a moral community in which each person is reciprocally end and means (CJ 1951:222). Not only the individual alone but all make the ends of others their own end so that universal happiness is directly promoted.

Kant offers an ethic which challenges the inversion of means and ends in the modern age and rejects the reduction of value to price.

This universal practical law derives from the objective principle of the will formed out of the conception of 'rational nature' as an 'end in itself' (GMM 1991:91). 'Man in the system of nature' 'has an ordinary value' but as the 'subject of a morally practical reason' he is 'exalted above all price'. As homo noumenon 'he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of other people, or even to his own ends, but is to be prized as an end in himself (Kant 1964:96/7). Beings dependent on nature rather than on will have only a relative worth as means and are therefore called 'things'. Rational beings are 'persons' since their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves. The individual as a rational being 'exists as an end in himself, not merely a means for arbitrary use by this or that will', but 'must in all his actions .. always be viewed at the same time as an end' (GMM 1991:90).

The concept of rational being, legislating universally by all maxims of its will so as to judge itself and its actions from this perspective, leads directly to the Formula of the End in Itself: 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end' (GMM 1991:91).

Kant's reference to 'humanity' rather than 'persons' is significant. In addressing the universal humanity in each individual, how humanity can and ought to be, Kant's ethics are social rather than private. Duties to oneself are duties to all. 'Humanity' is the final end of the individual, the highest good as the conception of the moral community applied to transform the human condition

Thus, whilst the realm of means is equated with the world of natural things, the realm of ends is equated with that of pure, self-determined intelligences. The Formula of Autonomy establishes that 'the will is .. not merely subject to the law but is so subject that it must be considered as also making the law for itself and precisely on this account as first of all subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author)' (GMM 1991:93). In acting out of respect for the moral law, the moral agent wills himself/herself and others as legislative selves (noumenal selves) and as colegislators in a moral order of universal cooperation (GMM 1991:98/9; Van Der Linden 1988:30). To treat others as ends in themselves respects the demand that individual agents should create a society of legislators concerned to promote each other's ends. Thus the formulation demands that the moral agent act always so that the will through its maxims could regard itself at the same time as 'making universal law' (GMM 1991:94).

This is a conception of a community of rational beings constituting their selfhood and self-worth in expansive relation with the moral individuality of all others (Cassirer 1981:248/9). There is a mutual growth here which achieves 'a systematic union of rational beings under common objective laws . . . Since these laws are directed precisely to the relation of such beings to one another as ends and means, this kingdom can be called a kingdom of ends (which is admittedly only an Ideal)' (GMM 1991:95). This 'systematic union of different rational beings' (GMM 1991:95) exists as an ideal of humanity as it 'ought to be', an ideal realm in which moral agents respect each other as legislators and as ends in themselves: 'A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a member, when, although he makes its universal laws, he is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as its head [sovereign], when as the maker of laws he is himself subject to the will of no other' (GMM 1991:95). In the realm of ends each upholds and promotes the conditions of autonomy.

By making the moral law their own end, moreover, individual agents together make their end the moral community in which each furthers the ends of the other, realising the highest good (Van Der Linden 1988:32/3 38). This realm, then, is composed not merely of monadic legislators lacking relation and interaction, but of colegislators in a reciprocal community: 'every rational being must so act as if he

were through his maxims always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends' (GMM 1991:100).

Submitting our maxims to the test of universality ensures that the pursuit of private ends no longer issues in conflict but instead generates a harmony of free and rational wills in a 'realm of ends' in which each person is reciprocally end and means.

This is an ideal of humanity as it ought to be, a realm of universal cooperation in which moral agents treat each other as ends in themselves.

The highest good is the ultimate normative Idea.

It has two parts: happiness and morality as the worthiness for happiness. The moral good is not sufficient for human beings because they need happiness. But happiness alone cannot be the highest good for rational beings. They should be morally good to deserve happiness. Their happiness should be commensurate with their morality. This rational ideal of concord between morality and happiness can only be realized in a perfect community of rational beings, where they are the authors of their own morals and happiness (A809/B837).

In such an ideal community, Kant reasons, 'all the actions of rational beings take place just as if they had proceeded from a supreme will that comprehends in itself, or under itself, all private wills' (A810/B838, tr. Kemp Smith).

Such an ideal community is an Idea derived from the supersensible world, which is governed by the morally perfect ruler (A812/B840). Kant calls it a *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) of rational beings (A808/B836). So he postulates the supersensible world as a moral kingdom. The highest good is demanded by pure reason.

31 NATURAL TELEOLOGY AND HUMAN PRAXIS

In the Appendix to the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*, Kant seeks to identify the ultimate purpose of nature as a whole. He finds this ultimate purpose in the realization of the highest good as presented in his moral theory. Human beings have a special role in realising this highest good by virtue of their rationality and

morality. The highest good can only be realized by human beings as rational and moral beings, which means that humankind is the ultimate purpose of nature as a whole (C3 427). In the second *Critique*, Kant argued that the highest good could be fully realized only in the eternal world of *noumena*. In the Appendix, he is now arguing that the realisation of the highest good is the ultimate purpose of nature. Kant thus conceives humankind as Nature's children developing under the guidance and protection of nature's providence.

Kant's view that the moral society is something that humanity ought to realise makes his philosophy both praxis-orientated and future-oriented. Kant's primacy of pure practical reason affirms the view that the world is created by human praxis (Goldmann 1971:57). As Van Der Linden argues, Kant's social ethics affirms that '(empirical) humanity, in order to express its humanity (rational/moral nature), must produce humanity (the moral order)' (Van Der Linden 1985:13).

Of particular importance is Kant's appraisal of moral enthusiasm and the capacity for social learning and control within humanity. Kant grounds the end of the perfect state and the union of all such states in perpetual peace in the full development of the rational predispositions of the human species. The 'technological predisposition' for manipulating things entails the increasing mastery of nature to satisfy human needs. The 'pragmatic predisposition' involves the increasing social, political and cultural power to organize and employ human beings to realize specific purposes and accustom human beings to rule-governed behaviour. The 'moral predisposition' to treat oneself and others according to 'the principle of freedom under laws' affirms that human beings come to obey juridical laws on account of autonomous motives and a concern to promote the ends of others, so long as these ends are consistent with the universal law. Progress is the moral disposition which enjoins human agents to fulfil the duty to promote the highest good, learning to pursue just institutions in greater numbers (A 1974:183).

According to Kant, humanity is a link like other animals in the chain of natural desires for happiness. What makes human beings unique is the ability and will to set their own goals. By virtue of this ability and will, human beings hold the title of lord of nature. As such, human beings must transcend

subjection to nature's purposes, and pursue their own independent purpose. This purpose enjoins humanity to create and sustain culture above and beyond nature (C3 431).

(It is worth noting here, in passing, that Richard Dawkins' concern with the need to teach generosity and altruism in order to build a society of cooperation and the common good, since we can expect 'little help from biological nature', is a basic theme in philosophy, and receives extensive and intricate treatment in Kant. Dawkins simply lacks the sophistication to deal with philosophical and theological questions, hence his tendency to caricature and polemic.)

Culture has two elements, through which the capacity to determine ends evolves in history. The 'culture of discipline' increases the tendency for human beings to submit to the demands of the moral law, coming to consult the voice of duty more and more. In the first *Critique*, Kant defined practical freedom as 'the will's independence of coercion through sensuous impulses' (A534/B562). The culture of discipline realises this practical freedom. Kant is developing Rousseau's argument that only by subjugating natural instincts and appetites, thus transcending the domain of nature, do human beings become truly human. This process implies the 'ethicisation of human nature' in which duty comes to lose its compulsory character and instead be guided by moral feelings like indignation, enthusiasm, solidarity, dignity (Van Der Linden 1985:173).

Kant's 'culture of discipline' is akin to Plato's 'culture of virtue' as laid out in the *Republic*. For Plato, human beings become divine by transforming their beastly passions into virtues. The idea of establishing the domain of culture over the domain of nature therefore takes up Plato's concern with the means of establishing the ideal city or state. The culture of discipline concerns the liberation of the will from the tyranny of desires and other natural chains, which shackle human beings to natural inclinations and prevent them from pursuing independent goals. For Kant, the 'culture of discipline' will enable humanity to establish their sovereignty over natural impulses and appetites and create a culture which makes it possible to institute a civil society for the liberty and equality of all citizens. This civil society takes human beings out of the state of nature,

transcending the despotism of natural inclinations in which the unconstrained freedom of each individual to pursue natural appetites and impulses serves to destroy the freedom of all individuals. For Kant, the final purpose of creation is civil society, established by the force of reason, coming to extend throughout and rule the whole world (C3 435).

It follows that the ultimate purpose of nature for humanity is to develop the culture of discipline. However, this is not a case of asserting culture *against* nature, since the culture of discipline is the development of natural endowment enabling humanity to transcend Nature in the same manner as children reach maturity in becoming independent of their mothers. This is Kant's natural teleology, humanity as the grown up children of Mother Nature.

The 'culture of skill' refers to the increasing capacity of human beings to manipulate the natural and social environment and involves conflict associated with material factors such as class, exploitation and division of labour (Van Der Linden 1985:137/138). The majority of human beings have had to submit to 'hard work' in order to produce 'the necessities of life .. for the convenience and leisure of others who work at the less necessary elements of culture, science and art' (CJ 1951:282). Against this, Kant proposes an egalitarian ethic beyond class division. For Kant, the progress of culture overcomes class conflict through a 'civil community' guaranteeing freedom and equality for all as citizens. Only in this, the perfect state, 'can the greatest development of natural capacities take place' (CJ 1951:282). Kant's conception of praxis therefore highlights the potential of the increasing rational capacity to control the natural and social environment in order to overcome conflict rooted in material scarcity and the autonomy of social mechanisms and institutions from human control.

For Kant, the purpose of the mastery of nature is culture, and the purpose of culture, in turn, is to realise the highest political good as a preparatory stage leading to the moral community. (Van Der Linden 1985:141). The external freedom guaranteed by political peace in and between perfect states creates conditions for autonomous action and diminishes the forces which encourage immoral acts.

Kant's moral praxis rests not on a religious hope but on the rational hope for progress, affirming that the future is something open, to be created by rational human agents.

Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason.

UH 1991:43

The very things which define human beings as rational beings - knowledge, insight, happiness, virtue - are given by nature as endowments and potentialities for human beings to live up to (Van Der Linden 1985:102/3). Kant, therefore, conceives history as a process of human self-creation. Culture, as 'what nature can supply to prepare [the human agent] for what he must do himself in order to be a final purpose' (CJ 1951:281), prepares the way for the moral society.

Kant's highest good as projecting an ideal community of colegislators shows the extent to which Kant's philosophy is future oriented and affirms a moral praxis. Human beings have a duty to change the world in order to realise a moral ideal. Kant advocated caution in politics, believing it 'foolhardy' and even 'punishable' to oppose an existing constitution with 'political constitutions which meet the requirements of reason' (CF Reiss ed. 1991:188). The perfect constitution and perpetual peace will be attained and maintained by rational moral action, not physical and material force. Kant nevertheless praised the French Revolution for arousing moral enthusiasm within 'all spectators', an enthusiasm deriving from 'a moral disposition within the human race' (CF Reiss ed 1991:182). (We should remember here that the Greek derivation of the word 'enthusiasm' means to be filled with God, *theos* – God is the moral law within each and all). Humanity has the 'disposition and

capacity' to effect social change autonomously, 'to be' the cause of its own advance toward the better' (1963:142). The prospect of the evolution of a condition of natural right in the relation of the individual to the state and of individual states to each other is founded upon this moral disposition, 'the right of every people to give itself a civil constitution of the kind that it sees fit', the 'enthusiasm with which men embrace the cause of goodness'. The enthusiasm of the spectators shows that 'true enthusiasm is always directed exclusively towards the ideal, particularly towards that which is purely moral (such as the concept of right), and it cannot be coupled with selfish interests' (CF Reiss ad 1991:183). As the enthusiasm of the spectators rather than of the Revolutionaries, it was an objective rather than a subjective concern with advancing humanity toward the highest good embodied in political institutions (Van Der Linden 1985:60).

The moral enthusiasm of the spectators of the French Revolution shows that voluntary cooperation and reciprocity is more than a philosophical dream (Van Der Linden 1985:61-64). Kant affirms here the power of example and association in motivating and sustaining moral action. The 'moral disposition' within the people possesses a tendency towards the moral society and for humanity as it ought to be, stimulating action toward the realisation of this ideal. Indicating that a moral cause is operative in humanity, events like the French Revolution reveal a capacity far the better in human nature and in society, which no philosopher or politician could discern from the course of things and which alone unites nature and freedom in accordance with the inner principles of right in humankind (Cassirer 1981:407). In the same manner, political events, campaigns, grassroots movements and organisations reveal the contours of a possible ideal future, give hope and inspire efforts leading to its attainment. Prefiguration in this sense is a Kantian view of the innate moral disposition of human beings.

Kant's thought, nevertheless, contains radical possibilities which serve to test Hegel's claim that *Sittlichkeit* embodies the 'ought' within the 'is'. Kant's motto of enlightenment - 'have the courage to use your own understanding!' (WE 1991:54) - celebrates the departure of human beings from all forms of tutelage, affirming a conception of autonomy which delegitimizes all social

and political institutions that are not the product of free will. Such a notion justifies liberation from all contexts or situations which are oppressive of human freedom (Yack 1986:89/133; cf Rose 1984; Lukacs 1971:108/9). This is not a repudiation of institutional mediation as such. On the contrary, Kant sought to realise freedom within the constraint of law, not against it, as in Fichte's 'self-sufficiency and independence outside of everything' (Fichte 1982:15). It simply emphasises that Kant's morality repudiates all dehumanising, alienating and oppressive conditions and institutions as the denial of the essential humanity, and dignity of human beings. In which case, Marx would later emerge as a Kantian in affirming the 'categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being' (CHPR:I 1975:251).

This begs the question of how reflective judgement mediates between the worlds of phenomena and noumena. The question involves the two-way transition, the upward transition from phenomena to noumena, which concerns the recognition of moral law; and the downward transition from noumena to phenomena, which concerns the realization of moral law. In answering the question of how aesthetic judgement makes these two transitions one has to recognise that Kant had two aesthetic theories, aesthetic formalism and aesthetic Platonism. In aesthetic formalism, reflective judgements are made by the subjective feeling that the free interplay of imagination and understanding provoke. Since this free interplay involves no supersensible world, there is no need for mediation. In Kant's aesthetic Platonism, there is a need for mediation since the ultimate foundation of all aesthetic judgements is the Idea of Beauty, and this belongs to the noumenal world. The Idea of Beauty is transcendent and abstract and is not therefore readily applicable to the phenomenal world, leaving a gap between *phenomena* and *noumena*. Bridging this gap requires aesthetic Ideas constructed by imagination and understanding, thus articulating the transcendent Idea of Beauty in terms of sensible imagery. This is what artistic genius and its inspiration does. In Platonic terms, this is the descent of Ideas from Heaven to the natural world. In Kantian terms, immanent aesthetic Ideas perform the mediation between

phenomena and *noumena*. With natural beauty as the expression of aesthetic Ideas, this mediatory transition is made by both human beings and nature.

Kant thus proposes a two-way mediation in teleological judgement. For Kant, natural purpose is a supersensible Idea that cannot be found in the blind mechanism of nature (C3 377). Human beings make the upward transition for recognizing the Idea and the downward transition for realizing the Idea in the natural world. But this mediation is made by both human beings and natural teleology. On the highest level, there may be only one Idea of natural purpose. For Plato, there is only one Idea of Life (*Timaeus* (39e)). However, every species has its own Idea of natural purpose and is governed in accordance with it. On this level, the multiplicity of teleological Ideas corresponds to the multiplicity of aesthetic Ideas. The various particular Ideas of natural purpose are generated by the articulation and specification of the one transcendent Idea of Life. In naming the objects of natural beauty, Kant often refers to living beings such as flowers, birds, and crustaceans. This implies the conclusion that the power of life includes the power of beauty. Thus Nature conjoins the Ideas of Life and Beauty and brings them from the supersensible to the sensible world. This descent of Ideas is engineered by the technique of Nature. Nature working like an artist (C3 390). Nature's two-way mediation between *phenomena* and *noumena* proceeds thus: Nature creates living beings in the phenomenal world by bringing down the supersensible Ideas, and one species amongst those living beings has the intelligence to apprehend the noumenal world. The moral and aesthetic life of human beings is a link in the creative cycle of natural teleology, which Kant in his *Idea of a Universal History* calls the Providence of Mother Nature.

In the middle of the third *Critique*, Kant abandons the formalist programme and propounds the revolutionary notion of immanent Ideas. The descent of transcendent Ideas from Platonic Heaven to the natural world fundamentally alters Kant's earlier conception of Nature. In the first *Critique* and in the *Groundwork*, Kant conceived Nature as a chaotic world of subjective impressions and natural inclinations, a world so unruly that Kant claimed that it was the ultimate source of all radical evil in human nature (R 19). This chaotic natural world could assume a rational order only through the *a priori* natural laws that human understanding comes to impose on

empirical impressions; the world of natural inclinations could only be controlled by imposing moral laws. However, the descent of transcendent Ideas from the Platonic world of Being releases Nature from the shackles of humanly imposed moral and natural laws since Nature is able to operate with the power of its own immanent Ideas. This opens up a conception of Mother Nature as the Eternal Feminine who has the inexhaustible power to procreate and sustain her countless children. Kant's vision is more expansive than this in arguing that human beings, Nature's children, are equipped with natural endowments that enable them to transcend their natural state and create their cultural world. thus realizing Nature's immanent Ideas. This is Kant's transcendent naturalism.

For Kant, Newton was the master of natural world and Rousseau was the master of the moral world. But neither could bridge the vast chasm between *phenomena* and *noumena*. Kant, in his later work, locates the solution for this, the key problem in his philosophy, in Nature. Nature is the original matrix for realizing the supersensible Ideas in the sensible world, even before the birth of humanity; the moral and political development of humanity is shaped under the auspices of Nature's eternal providence. His acceptance of the mechanistic conception of nature had prevented Kant from grasping this cosmic truth in his earlier work. Acknowledging Nature as the living force resolves Kant's ultimate philosophical problem and bridges the chasm between *noumena* and *phenomena*. Kant's solution savours a great deal of Plato's conception of the natural world in the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge, the spirit of the natural world (the World-Soul), creates all things in accordance with the eternal Ideas.

Moral and political philosophy began with Socrates and the stand he took against the overweening claims to knowledge on the part of natural philosophers who studied nature with no regard to human beings. Plato continued this spiritual quest, connecting the fight against the amoral forces of nature with the fight against the immoral forces of human beings. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles, the avowed champion of amoral naturalism and immoral humanism, is confronted by Socrates' argument that that one could be virtuous even in a totally immoral world and that one's soul could never be harmed by the immoral acts of others. In the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, Plato finds a safe haven for the virtuous soul in the

intelligible world of Ideas. In this world, the soul was safe from the immorality of the phenomenal world. However, the safe haven of the intelligible world could never provide a living community for moral individuals. In the *Republic*, Plato set out the principles of the ideal state as a moral community which provides for the moral life of individuals. Recognising the difficulty of realising a just society in an amoral and irrational world, Plato laid out his conception of a rational and orderly universe in the *Timaeus* – which Plato presents as the cosmological foundation for his ideal state of the *Republic* and for the city of Magnesia proposed in the *Laws*.

Kant reaffirms the Platonic conception of the rational order of Nature in his Ideological conception of natural order. Kant is continuing Plato's quest for a suitable natural order for the realization of eternal ideals. In this quest, Kant revitalises the Platonic conception of Nature as the Mother of all Creation. If Kant's conception of the *noumena* and the categorical imperative retained the Christian legacy, then this conception of Mother Nature taps into the nature religions of the Old World and looks forward to contemporary attempts to locate the place of human beings within Nature. Certainly, the conception was a key figure in Goethe's *Faust*, where Nature manifests her inexhaustible creative power as the Earth Spirit, the Eternal Mothers, and the Eternal Feminine. The idea inspired the supernatural naturalism of Romantic philosophers and poets. Along with the conception of immanent Ideas, this natural teleology is one of Kant's most enduring achievements and is likely to become even more relevant in the coming years as human beings deal with the task of making their peace with Nature.

32 KANT'S SOCRATISM

For all of the achievements of the natural philosophers, Socrates inaugurated the most important epoch of ancient Greek philosophy by shifting the centre ground from physical explanation to moral meaning and action. Socrates infused the philosophical spirit with a moral purpose and *practical* direction. For this reason, Socrates is considered to be the first philosopher, in the sense of living his life as a lover of wisdom. On the level of conduct, Socrates is the man whose life came closest to *the ideal of a wise man*.

There is a straight line of descent leading from Socrates to Kant, a line which concerns Being, reason and wisdom, philosophy not as an intellectual pursuit but, more, as a way of life that realises the rational end of all humanity. The central theme is conduct and what is considered the proper life of the individual as a human being. Kant's Socratism is worth developing at length, since Socratism anchors the entire thesis laid out in this book. Kant's achievement is to allow us to recover the profound philosophical insights of antiquity on a modern terrain. The Kantian revolution in philosophy is still unfolding in the world today.

Whilst philosophers have commented upon the relation of Kant to Plato, the extent of Kant's Socratism has yet to be fully appreciated. If we seek to understand Kant's philosophic aim as Kant himself understood it, and if Kant understood his aim to be Socratic, then it follows that we should seek insight into the nature of Kant's Socratism.

Kant explicitly places himself in the Socratic tradition. A metaphysics constructed in conformity with a critique of pure reason is of infinite value in orienting the social life of human beings, silencing objections to morality in Socratic fashion, that is, by the demonstrating the clearest proof of the ignorance of the objectors. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, 1965), B xxxi).

There is no pretence at attempting to teaching common reason something new. Instead, following the example of Socrates, the attention of reason is drawn to its own principle, showing human beings what they need to know and do in order to be honest and good, and thus become wise and virtuous. (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis and New York, 1959), p. 20; *KGS IV*, p. 404.)

Science and philosophy as mere intellectual pursuits are not enough. Socrates was concerned to emphasise the relation of knowledge to the conduct of life. The mere theoretician, whom Socrates calls the *philodoxus*, is concerned only with the pursuit of speculative knowledge. Socrates went much further than this in his concern that knowledge should contribute to the ultimate end of human reason. (Kant, *Logic* 1974; *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin and New York, 1902—), IX, p. 24).

The assertion that Kant is Socratic is hardly a controversial notion in itself. The weight of evidence strongly supports the connection of Kant with Socratic philosophy. Kant is considered to have breathed new life into the "ideas" of Plato in his practical philosophy and into the "categories" of Aristotle in his theoretical philosophy. In doing this, Kant himself assumed that he was working in the Socratic tradition. (*Logic*, 34; *KGS IX*, p. 29-30). Kant praises Socrates for inaugurating "the most important epoch of Greek philosophy." In like manner, Kant sees himself as launching a new epoch in philosophy. This makes Kant a *Socrates redivivus*, as many have remarked (Consider the remark of Herder quoted by Gerhard Funke in *Die Aufklärung* (Einleitung, "Das Sokratische Jahrhundert"), p. 13 (Stuttgart, 1963): "Ich will. . . ihn [Kant] seiner Absicht nach Sokrates nennen und seiner Philosophie den Fortgang dieser seiner Absicht wünschen, dass nämlich, etc." For some discussions of Kant's reading of ancient philosophy see the following: Diising 1971: 5-42; Schmucker 1961: 307; Wundt 1924:pp 153ff). The case for Kant's Socratism, however, does not rest solely or even mainly on the new life that Kant breathed into the "ideas" and "categories". Kant's doctrine of the "primacy of the practical" highlights the emphasis on the practical as the central philosophical concern of Socrates.

This view of Kant's Socratism is fairly familiar but is not strictly the way that Kant saw it at all. The primary argumentation of the *Critique* reveals Kant's main purpose. Kant's key concern, the central purpose of the *Critique*, is whether and how metaphysics could become a science with recognized methods and results. (CPR 1965), B xiv—xv, xxii.).

How come I then to predicate of that which happens something quite different, and to apprehend that the concept of cause, though not contained in it, yet belongs, and indeed necessarily belongs to it? What is here the unknown X which gives support to the understanding when it believes that it can discover outside the concept A a predicate B foreign to this concept, which it yet at the same time considers to be connected with it? It cannot be experience, because the suggested principle has connected the second representation with the first, not only with greater universality, but also with the character of necessity, and therefore completely *a priori* and on the basis of mere concepts. Upon such synthetic, that is, ampliative principles, all our *a priori* speculative knowledge

must ultimately rest; analytic judgments are very important, and indeed necessary, but only for obtaining that clearness in the concepts which is requisite for such a sure and wide synthesis as will lead to a genuinely new addition to all previous knowledge.

CPR 1965, B xiv

For Kant, metaphysics is the attempt on the part of pure reason to answer questions which it gives to itself.

And so we have the question:

How is metaphysics, as natural disposition, possible?

that is, how from the nature of universal human reason do those questions arise which pure reason propounds to itself, and which it is impelled by its own need to answer as best it can?

Neither questions nor answers are established with the assistance of "experience."

First of all, it has to be noted that mathematical propositions, strictly so called, are always judgments *a priori*, not empirical; because they carry with them necessity, which cannot be derived from experience.

CPR 1965, B xv

Kant refers to *metaphysica naturalis*, defining metaphysics in terms of a natural disposition to ask and attempt to answer such questions according to pure reason. This, for Kant, is a universal feature of human reason.

Yet, in a certain sense, this *kind of knowledge* is to be looked upon as given; that is to say, metaphysics actually exists, if not as a science, yet still as natural disposition (*metaphysica naturalis*). For human reason, without being moved merely by the idle desire for extent and variety of knowledge, proceeds impetuously, driven on by an inward need, to questions such as cannot be

answered by any empirical employment of reason, or by principles thence derived. Thus in all men, as soon as their reason has become ripe for speculation, there has always existed and will always continue to exist some kind of metaphysics.

CPR, B xxi-xxii.

Whilst metaphysics as a natural disposition is not a discovery that can be credited to individual philosophers, philosophy as "*cognition in abstracto*" can be credited to the ancient Greeks, including certain individuals among them. (*Logic*, pp. 31ff.; *KGS IX*, pp. 21ff.) Kant's point here is that since we cannot credit any philosophers with the discovery of metaphysics - not Thales, not Anaximenes, not Anaximander and not Parmenides - the greatest esteem must go to the individual who discovered the truest form of philosophizing. This, for Kant, is Socrates. Metaphysics is the primary ground, the ground of our philosophical Being. More than an ethical teacher, giving answers, Socrates is the philosopher who shows us the correct way of stating the question *about* metaphysics. In this manner, Socrates can be considered the first philosopher. Socrates was the first to reveal the connection between metaphysics, in becoming a concern of "science," or of "the learned," and the practical concerns of ordinary men and women. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics q8jb i ff.*)

In ascertaining the precise nature of Kant's Socratism, we need to establish the extent to which Kant's way of seeing "the problem of metaphysics" follows the Socratic way. Further, we need to establish the extent to which any such Socratism conditions or is a premise of the primary "critical" argumentation of Kant's work.

It can be stated clearly, for reasons given above, that Kant's Socratism is a transformation rather than repetition of Socrates. Kant's philosophy is wholly modern and quite distinct from any version of Socratism to be found in the ancient schools. But the connection is there. Kant effected a revolution in philosophy by breathing new life into Platonic ideas and Aristotelian categories. The 'new' in this new life is Kant's unique 'Socratic' achievement. Kant didn't just revive Plato's 'ideas' but produced a new, original doctrine of "ideas". This is Kant's relation to Socrates, a philosopher who understands his predecessor "better than he has understood himself." (*CPR*, A 314/6 370.)

Kant himself was explicit about the wholly nontraditional and hence non-Socratic aspects of his philosophical endeavour. Kant claimed originality in attempting a "critique of reason" as the necessary propaedeutic to metaphysics. (CPR, A 314/6 370; A11/B25ff.,A841/B869). The attempt to extend our knowledge into the first causes and principles of Being must be preceded by an examination of the sources, extent, and limits of rational knowledge. Up to this point, philosophers, in accordance with a "natural" tendency of human reason, have proceeded by building their "speculative structures" before inquiring "whether the foundations are reliable." (CPR, A 314/6 370; A 5/69.)

Misled by such a proof of the power of reason, the demand for the extension of knowledge recognises no limits. The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to the understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of the pure understanding. He did not observe that with all his efforts he made no advance—meeting no resistance that might, as it were, serve as a support upon which he could take a stand, to which he could apply his powers, and so set his understanding in motion. It is, indeed, the common fate of human reason to complete its speculative structures as speedily as may be, and only afterwards to enquire whether the foundations are reliable. All sorts of excuses will then be appealed to, in order to reassure us of their solidity, or rather indeed to enable us to dispense altogether with so late and *so* dangerous an enquiry.

Hence Kant presents the critique of the pure rational faculties as "a perfectly new science, of which no one has ever even thought, the very idea of which was unknown," although Hume came closest to the idea. (Kant 1950: 9-10; *KGS IV*, pp. 261-62). Kant was very familiar with Hume's philosophy and so has knowledge of previous modern attempts to define "the limits of reason." Kant acknowledges Hume's importance, but his own questions go even further.

That metaphysics has hitherto remained in so vacillating a state of uncertainty and contradiction, is entirely due to the fact that this problem, and perhaps even the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, has never previously been considered. Upon the solution of this problem, or upon a sufficient proof that the possibility which it desires to have explained does in fact not exist at all, depends the success or failure of metaphysics. Among philosophers, David Hume came nearest to envisaging this problem, but still was very far from conceiving it with sufficient definiteness and universality. He occupied himself exclusively with the synthetic proposition regarding the connection of an effect with its cause (*principium causalitatis*), and he believed himself to have shown that such an *a priori* proposition is entirely impossible. If we accept his conclusions, then all that we call metaphysics is a mere delusion whereby we fancy ourselves to have rational insight into what, in actual fact, is borrowed solely from experience, and under the influence of custom has taken the illusory semblance of necessity. If he had envisaged our problem in all its universality, he would never have been guilty of this statement, so destructive of all pure philosophy. For he would then have recognised that, according to his own argument, pure mathematics, as certainly containing *a priori* synthetic propositions, would also not be possible; and from such an assertion his good sense would have saved him.

Kant's originality lies in the formulation of the hitherto unasked question: "How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?" This question contains the whole "problem of reason." It is the crucial question of the critical propaedeutic. (CPR, B19ff).

In the solution of the above problem, we are at the same time deciding as to the possibility of the employment of pure reason in establishing and developing all those sciences which contain a theoretical *a priori* knowledge of objects, and have therefore to answer the questions:

How is pure mathematics possible? How is pure science of nature possible?

It is on this question "How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?" that Kant claims to have advanced beyond antiquity: "If it had occurred to any of the ancients even to raise this question, this by itself would, up to our time, have been a powerful

influence against all systems of pure reason, and would have saved us so many of those vain attempts, which have been blindly undertaken without knowledge of what it is that requires to be done." (CPR B14-15).

Natural science (physics) contains a priori synthetic judgments as principles. I need cite only two such judgments: that in all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged; and that in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal. Both propositions, it is evident, are not only necessary, and therefore in their origin *a priori*, but also synthetic. For in the concept of matter I do not think its permanence, but only its presence in the space which it occupies. I go outside and beyond the concept of matter, joining to it *a priori* in thought something which I have not thought *in* it. The proposition is not, therefore, analytic, but synthetic, and yet is thought *a priori*; and so likewise are the other propositions of the pure part of natural science.

CPR B18

The question of whether metaphysics as a science, that is, as a body of *a priori* synthetic knowledge, is possible depends upon us having answered the question of whether and to what extent reason can have *a priori* knowledge which goes beyond mere "analysis" of concepts, and which "synthetically" extends knowledge. (CPR B18).

Metaphysics, even if we look upon it as having hitherto failed in all its endeavours, is yet, owing to the nature of human reason, a quite indispensable science, and *ought to contain a priori synthetic knowledge*. For its business is not merely to analyse concepts which we make for ourselves *a priori* of things, and thereby to clarify them analytically, but to extend our *a priori* knowledge. And for this purpose we must employ principles which add to the given concept something that was not contained in it, and through *a priori* synthetic judgments venture out so far that experience is quite unable to follow us, as, for instance, in the proposition, that the world must have a first beginning, and such like. Thus metaphysics consists, at least *in intention*, entirely of *a priori* synthetic propositions.

To determine whether Kant is as good as his claims here, we need to examine the assumptions that contained in Kant's account of "the problem of reason." The Kantian question of "possibility" must be asked of Kant himself: What assumptions make it possible for Kant to formulate the "problem" the way he does? In the context of the arguments developed in this book, this examination should proceed in a way that has a direct bearing upon the Socratic tradition of philosophizing and the nature of Kant's own Socratism. It should be emphasised that Kant modelled his philosophical revolution, his new science, the critical propaedeutic, upon logic. Kant considered logic to be an already existing and completed science. At the heart of the new science is a new logic: Kant's transcendental logic. Kant describes the traditional logic as "general" and as concerned with the "rules of all thought". Applying to any object, such logic to Kant is a dead end, self-contained and unable to advance.

That logic has already, from the earliest times, proceeded upon this sure path is evidenced by the fact that since Aristotle it has not required to retrace a single step, unless, indeed, we care to count as improvements the removal of certain needless subtleties or the clearer exposition of its recognised teaching, features which concern the elegance rather than the certainty of the science. It is remarkable also that to the present day this logic has not been able to advance a single step, and is thus to all appearance a closed and completed body of doctrine.

CPR B viii.

Logic is capable of completion, since its subject matter is the understanding itself. The understanding is able to give a complete account of its own operations, which form the content of the logical doctrine. However, through an *inspectio mentis*, the understanding cannot oversee the nature and extent of objects given to it from outside itself.

We do not enlarge but disfigure sciences, if we allow them to trespass upon one another's territory. The sphere of logic is quite precisely delimited; its sole concern is to give an exhaustive exposition and a strict proof of the formal rules

of all thought, whether it be *a priori* or empirical, whatever be its origin or its object, and whatever hindrances, accidental or natural, it may encounter in our minds.

That logic should have been thus successful is an advantage which it owes entirely to its limitations, whereby it is justified in abstracting—indeed, it is under obligation to do so—from all objects of knowledge and their differences, leaving the understanding nothing to deal with save itself and its form. But for reason to enter on the sure path of science is, of course, much more difficult, since it has to deal not with itself alone but also with objects. Logic, therefore, as a propaedeutic, forms, as it were, only the vestibule of the sciences; and when we are concerned with specific modes of knowledge, while logic is indeed presupposed in any critical estimate of them, yet for the actual acquiring of them we have to look to the sciences properly and objectively so called.

CPR B ix

Kant is attempting to resolve the problems of metaphysics with respect to reason, its claims and its limits. The resolution of the question depends upon the extent of human knowledge. This depends upon knowing the limits of reason.

While I am saying this I can fancy that I detect in the face of the reader an expression of indignation, mingled with contempt, at pretensions seemingly so arrogant and vain-glorious. Yet they are incomparably more moderate than the claims of all those writers who on the lines of the usual programme profess to prove the simple nature of the soul or the necessity of a first beginning of the world. For while such writers pledge themselves to extend human knowledge beyond all limits of possible experience, I humbly confess that this is entirely beyond my power. I have to deal with nothing save reason itself and its pure thinking; and to obtain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self. Common logic itself supplies an example, how all the simple acts of reason can be enumerated completely and systematically. The subject of the present enquiry is the [kindred] question, how much we can hope to achieve by reason, when all the material and assistance of experience are taken away.

CPR B ix

Are we so far removed from Socrates, the man who was wisest of all in knowing that he did not know? To answer in the affirmative would be hasty, given the way that Kant defined the limits of reason via a transcendental logic of experience.

Kant articulated the possibility of a final resolution of the problems of metaphysics by means of an analogy between reason's self-knowledge of its "pure" logical employment and such self-knowledge reason might acquire by way of its pure employment in metaphysics.

Kant affirms the possibility that reason can fully know its own powers. However:

But since all attempts which have hitherto been made to answer these natural questions—for instance, whether the world has a beginning or is from eternity—have always met with unavoidable contradictions, we cannot rest satisfied with the mere natural disposition to metaphysics, that is, with the pure faculty of reason itself, from which, indeed, some sort of metaphysics (be it what it may) always arises.

CPR B 22

Therefore:

It must be possible for reason to attain to certainty whether we know or do not know the objects of metaphysics, that is, to come to a decision either in regard to the objects of its enquiries or in regard to the capacity or incapacity of reason to pass any judgment upon them, so that we may either with confidence extend our pure reason or set to it sure and determinate limits.

CPR B 22

Kant here affirms the possibility that reason could ascertain the extent of its knowledge with respect to the objects of metaphysics and hence come to know the "limits" of its powers. The problems of metaphysics do not derive from the objects of reason but from within reason itself, since they "are imposed upon it by its own nature, not by the nature of things which are distinct from it." (B 23).

With Kant's transcendental "logic of experience", this perspective would appear to take us far away from Socratism in its ancient form. Kant, however, highlights the Socratic element in his thinking within the propaedeutical function ascribed to this transcendental logic.

These questions concern not the 'monopoly of the schools' of philosophy but the "interests of humanity," (CPR Bxxxii). Kant invests "humanity" in this sense with a moral force greater than any other questions; for their solution "the mathematician would gladly exchange the whole of his science." (CPR A463/8491.) The nonsceptical solutions to these questions "are so many foundation stones of morals and religion," so that speculative metaphysics "promises a secure foundation for our highest expectations in respect of those ultimate ends towards which all the endeavours of reason must ultimately converge." (A466/B494,A463/B491.) In a section entitled 'The Canon of Pure Reason', contained in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant concludes his strategy for solving the problem of metaphysics by demonstrating that Critical philosophy is able to bring harmony to reason and thus validate the moral order through its vindication of the metaphysics of experience and criticism of transcendent metaphysics. The Canon therefore outlines the contours of the future development of the Critical system, the architecture of which is built upon three key questions (A804—5/B832-3):

- 4 What can I know?
- 5 What ought I to do?
- 6 What may I hope?

(Kant A 804-5/B 832-33.) (see Critchley, P. 2007. *Kant and the Ethics of Rational Nature*.)

These three questions combine all the interests of reason. Kant provides an account of metaphysics which establishes an architectonic principle for all of reason. In Kant's judgment, the definition of philosophy he presents on this basis is Socratic. He reasons that "the whole equipment of reason" is determined by nature to find the solution to metaphysical problems. All metaphysics issues in the practical "ideas" of God, freedom, and immortality, the supports of morality. (8 395, A 800/8 828.)

These unavoidable problems set by pure reason itself are *God, freedom, and immortality*. The science which, with all its preparations, is in its final intention directed solely to their solution is metaphysics..

Kant CPR 1982: 47

Kant means by this that the whole of reason is naturally (rather than contingently, or conventionally) determined toward the discovery of the foundations of morality, or towards the elaboration of the theoretical grounds which support the hopes of rational morality in seeking to achieve its ends in the world. It is here, then, that the critical propaedeutic finds its *telos*: its task is "to level the ground [of reason] and to render it sufficiently secure for moral edifices." (A 319/B 376.) Without this foundation in the moral teleology of reason, the critical propaedeutic (with its "logic") is unintelligible.

Kant is a teleological thinker in clear line of descent from the ancient philosophers, who affirmed the idea that all rationality must be related to a highest organizing *telos*, moral in nature. The ancient philosophers thus conceived philosophy as the "teleology of human reason."

"philosophy is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason . . . "

CPR ax A 839-40/8 867-68

Kant is probably referring here to the ancient post-Socratics, who "in the use of the term 'philosopher' meant especially the moralist" (CPR B868). This tradition defines the highest good as the achievement of the ends of morality within the natural world. Philosophy therefore concerns the scientific knowledge of the "highest good". (*Critique of Practical Reason*, Bk. II, chap. 1).

To define this idea practically, i.e., sufficiently for the maxims of our rational conduct, is the business of practical wisdom, and this again as a science is philosophy, in the sense in which the word was understood by the ancients, with whom it meant instruction in the conception in which the *summum bonum* was to be placed, and the conduct by which it was to be obtained.

In this, the ancients were correct. "In moral philosophy we have not advanced beyond the ancients." (*Logic*, op. cit., p. 37; *KGS IX*, p. 32.)

The supremacy of reason as such plants a practical *telos* within philosophy, making the philosopher "the lawgiver of human reason". The philosopher legislates the systematic unity of reason, establishing the single organizing principle to which all else is subordinate. (*Vide supra*, nn. 46,47.) As a result, Kant is able to equate reason's inherent theoretical demand for "systematic unity" with its highest "practical" demand: the demand for "purposive unity" among the aspects of rationality is "founded in the will's own essential nature." (CPR,A817/B845.) The systematic character of philosophy and the practical or legislative character of philosophy are therefore essentially in unity as two aspects of the same thing. Kant's claim is that philosophy alone "gives systematic unity to all other sciences" and hence is "the only science which has systematic coherence in the proper sense." (*Logic*, op. cit., p. 28; *KGS IX*, p. 24.) Only that which *gives* systematic unity properly *has* such unity itself. And that, for Kant, is philosophy. Since legislative-practical reason endows science with systematic unity, it follows that this same reason will both demand and effect the completion of metaphysics as science. (*CPR A*, xiii-xiv.)

It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not

by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws. This tribunal is no other than the *critique of pure reason*.

I do not mean by this a critique of books and systems, but of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive *independently of all experience*. It will therefore decide as to the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general, and determine its sources, its extent, and its limits—all in accordance with principles.

CPR A xii.

The demand that wholeness be attained thus makes necessary the "completion" of metaphysics. Reason cannot be a true 'whole' so long as certain natural questions of reason must remain unanswered. Kant underlines the practical character of this legislative setting of limits with language concerning its "negative" implications for speculative reason. The critique's (or propaedeutic's) primary use is negative.

But, it will be asked, what sort of a treasure is this that we propose to bequeath to posterity? What is the value of the metaphysics that is alleged to be thus purified by criticism and established once for all? On a cursory view of the present work it may seem that its results are merely *negative*, warning us that we must never venture with speculative reason beyond the limits of experience. Such is in fact its primary use.

"It is therefore the first and most important task of philosophy to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its injurious influence, by attacking its errors at their very source" (B xxxi).

In view of all these considerations, we arrive at the idea of a special science which can be entitled the Critique of Pure Reason. For reason is the faculty which supplies the principles of *a priori* knowledge. Pure reason is, therefore, that which contains the principles whereby we know anything absolutely *a priori*. An organon of pure reason would be the sum-total of those principles according to which all modes of pure *a priori* knowledge can be acquired and actually brought into being. The exhaustive application of such an organon would give rise to a

system of pure reason. But as this would be asking rather much, and as it is still doubtful whether, and in what cases, any extension of our knowledge be here possible, we can regard a science of the mere examination of pure reason, of its sources and limits, as the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason. As such, it should be called a critique, not a doctrine, of pure reason. Its utility, in speculation, ought properly to be only negative, not to extend, but only to clarify our reason, and keep it free from errors—which is already a very great gain. I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*. A system of such concepts might be entitled transcendental philosophy.

CPR A11-12/B 25

Since the "injurious" dialectic of metaphysics endangers the attainment of the highest moral end, the elimination of metaphysical error takes precedence over the pursuit of knowledge unfettered by practical considerations.

Kant moves from the 'negative' implications to the 'positive', the way that the sweeping away of error opens up the possibility of the practical employment of reason.

But such teaching at once acquires a *positive* value when we recognise that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its proper limits do not in effect *extend* the employment of reason, but, as we find on closer scrutiny, inevitably *narrow* it. These principles properly belong [not to reason but] to sensibility, and when thus employed they threaten to make the bounds of sensibility coextensive with the real, and so to supplant reason in its pure (practical) employment. So far, therefore, as our Critique limits speculative reason, it is indeed *negative*; but since it thereby removes an obstacle which stands in the way of the employment of practical reason, nay threatens to destroy it, it has in reality a *positive* and very important use. At least this is so, immediately we are convinced that there is an absolutely necessary *practical* employment of pure reason—the *moral*—in which it inevitably goes beyond

the limits of sensibility. Though [practical] reason, in thus proceeding, requires no assistance from speculative reason, it must yet be assured against its opposition, that reason may not be brought into conflict with itself. To deny that the service which the Critique renders is *positive* in character, would thus be like saying that the police are of no positive benefit, inasmuch as their main business is merely to prevent the violence of which citizens stand in mutual fear, in order that each may pursue his vocation in peace and security.

CPR B xxv

There is nothing 'empty' about Kant's theoretical concerns. Kant's philosophy is fundamentally practical in its orientation. Kant's is a philosophy which is located within the world, transforming it from within via the *telos* of human reason. Reason itself is the faculty which undertakes the critique of reason, reason operating by its own compulsion through the combination of its practical requirement of systematic wholeness (the realization of the *telos* of moral freedom in the "moral world") and its experience of frustration in the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of this end. (*Prolegomena*, op. cit., p. 75; *KGS IV*, p. 327.)

The establishing of the "limit" or *quid juris* is the stipulation that these pure sciences are the only sciences which "extend" knowledge, thus providing a *criterion* for possible extension of knowledge. Speculative metaphysics fails to meet this stipulation. (CPR Bxvff.) The concern is less with the "internal teleology" of these pure sciences than with their critical employment in the propaedeutic, seeking the practical end of reason (metaphysics).

We can now establish the distinctive character of Kant's Socratism with greater clarity. Kant recovered and established on firmer foundations the Socratic conception of philosophy as being essentially directed towards the knowledge of ultimate ends (the good, the *summum bonum*). In this regard, Kant is quite distinct from other modern philosophers whose Socratism came with a "theodicean" dimension. Kant's Socratism holds that the metaphysical elaboration of the good fails to differentiate the philosopher from common opinion with respect to highest ends. Philosophers such as Hume had already placed all human activity on the plane of passion, thereby subverting the

distinction between the true rational good and the merely apparent good of passion. Against this, Kant unites all humankind at the level of the "natural metaphysical" interest. The "interests of humanity," (CPR Bxxxii) is satisfied not speculatively, but only through the "practical" achievement of a "moral world." Kant establishes the good as the highest end. Common "moral belief" is the surest guide to the nature of the good, in that moral belief leads unerringly to the organizing *telos* of all rational activity, thus bringing about the highest end. Moral belief is therefore the ground of the true nonspeculative "metaphysics." It follows from this that ". . . in matters which concern all men without distinction nature is not guilty of any partial distribution of gifts, and . . . in regard to the essential ends of human nature the highest philosophy can not advance further than is possible under the guidance which nature has bestowed upon the most ordinary understanding." (CPR A 831/B 859).

Plato's Socratism sought to liberate the soul from conventional fetters and therefore involved the philosophical critique of common moral belief and opinion. Kant's Socratism is of a different character. Kant conceives common 'moral belief' to be the surest guide to the nature of the good, being inherently connected to the organizing *telos* of all rational activity. Plato and Kant are diametrically opposed in this regard. Avowing the commonness of the highest *telos*, Kant affirms the capacity of human beings to apprehend the nature of the good and thus refutes the Platonic imperative to leave the "cave" of opinion in order to see the natural light of truth.

One should be careful of too sharp a contrast here. Kant's philosophy is democratic in the sense that he holds that all humankind, by virtue of innate reason, is capable of apprehending the moral truth of the good. In this respect, Kant proposes a notion of philosopher-rulers, the idea that philosophy should rule via the realisation of the natural reason which is innate in each and all. This contrasts with the potential elitism of Plato's philosopher-ruler. Kant subverts the theoretico-elitist model of truth in favour of a practical and democratic conception grounded in the natural teleology of reason. But it remains the case that Kant and Plato share a commitment to the true and the good as well as to their realisation. Eschewing any simple distinction between opinion and knowledge, mass and elite, Kant's more optimistic assessment of the rational faculties of human beings leads him to repudiate the pessimistic aspects of Plato's metaphysics of the cave. Nature has given human beings the capacity to liberate themselves via their

own reason. They are capable of being philosophers and therefore do not stand in need of a philosopher ruler bringing them reason from the outside. Enlightenment comes from within the world of Becoming, not from elite knowledge of the world of Being.

Kant gives us a Socrates for a new, democratic age and thus subverts the theoretico-elitist model of the metaphysical tradition. For Kant, this tradition has failed to live up to the practical and skeptical spirit of ancient Socratism. (Tonelli in H. Heimsoeth, D. Henrich, and G. Tonelli ed 1967: 118, nn. 32 and 37. Also KGS XXIV ("Blomberg Logic") par. 178, p. 212.) Indeed, Socrates himself had failed to subordinate metaphysics to a universal *telos*, to the 'interests of humanity', a deficiency which is concomitant with the ancient failure to understand the requirements of a scientific metaphysics. Kant himself does not identify this defect in the ancient Socrates, using "Socrates" as a metaphor capable of symbolising the new era in philosophy. Thus Kant sees himself as completing rather than repudiating the philosophical endeavours of the ancient philosophers. His point is that the true nature and scope of this philosophical project had been but faintly perceived in antiquity. In this respect, Kant does not condemn the Socratic tradition for having erred but considers such errors to be the flawed ruminations of an early, untutored wisdom. Kant sought to ground this wisdom in well-articulated arguments. In this respect, Kant shared the fundamental condescension of the Enlightenment towards all antiquity. Kant believed in "progress" in a philosophic sense, as distinct from technical or other forms of progress. For Kant, such progress implied the elimination of the distinction between philosophic and nonphilosophic reason, i.e., the ancient distinction between *nous* (knowledge) and *doxa* (opinion), through the attainment of wisdom on the part of the whole species. If philosophy is conceived essentially to be a way of life that begins anew with each philosopher, with the *telos* of philosophy located in that life, or in the activity of the mind that life makes possible, then philosophy cannot be considered to be essentially progressive. Kant is concerned to repudiate this view. Philosophy, for Kant, is essentially progressive; there is such a thing as philosophic progress. The ancients did not know this, evincing a naive standpoint with respect to nature in general, as in the "nature" of the philosopher and distinctions between this "nature" and other "natures". (*Critique of Practical Reason*, Bk. II, chap. 2, sec. 5)

This is no mere philosophical quibbling but pertains to the crucial point with respect to philosophizing as a way of life which realises the end of rational human nature. The notion of philosophical virtue in antiquity rests on an error which is common to all of the Greek schools, that is, the reliance on the merely natural use of human powers. The Greeks would speak of the 'natural character' which distinguishes this person as this and that person as that. A person could be a 'natural' philosopher, a 'natural' politician, a 'natural' soldier and so on. Aristotle wrote of those who are slaves by nature. Whilst the cultivation of the virtues and the excellences remains valid in terms of human flourishing, the problem with the ancient way of speaking about nature is seen clearly in Plato's notion of fitting individuals to the tasks for which their natures are best suited. Such a notion easily fits not a meritocracy but an organised hierarchical functionalism that fails to respect what Kant calls the 'interests of humanity'. Nature, as Marx demonstrated, has a history. In this sense, human beings make themselves what they are by developing their essences within historically specific social relations.

The reasoning 'by nature' is simplistic. Kant demonstrates that nature is "nature" only when subject to universal "laws." Kant, in this sense, is concerned to democratise the idea of virtue by revaluing the rational faculties of all humankind. The error of the ancients lies in the assumption that philosophic autonomy can be achieved without the subordination of the philosopher's own use of reason to "universal maxims." The ancient philosopher considers himself capable of achieving autonomy through the employment of the "gifts" given to him and his like by nature. However, since philosophy is law-giving itself and not just another natural phenomenon, it follows that no natural kind can claim to be a philosophical kind. Philosophy is essentially a doctrine of "ends," demonstrating how ends are achieved through rational legislation. This legislation is universal in scope, meaning that philosophy can be concerned only with universal ends. This is the central aspect of Kant's philosophy and leads beyond nature to "history." Reason doesn't just have a nature, it has a history. There is a future state to be attained, towards which humanity must progress in order to realise its own natural end. The end is the philosophic legislation of universal ends, to be achieved by the species as a whole. This is not yet a "fact" but is to be made a fact by human moral action. The attainment of this end depends upon the universal comprehension and implementation of certain, 'critical' doctrines.

In man (as the only rational creature on earth), those natural capacities which are directed towards the use of his reason are such that they could be fully developed only in the species, but not in the individual. Reason, in a creature, is a faculty which enables that creature to extend far beyond the limits of natural instinct the rules and intentions it follows in using its various powers, and the range of its projects is unbounded. But reason does not itself work instinctively, for it requires trial, practice and instruction to enable it to progress gradually from one stage of insight to the next. Accordingly, every individual man would have to live for a vast length of time if he were to learn how to make complete use of all his natural capacities; or if nature has fixed only a short term for each man's life (as is in fact the case), then it will require a long, perhaps incalculable series of generations, each passing on its enlightenment to the next, before the germs implanted by nature in our species can be developed to that degree which corresponds to nature's original intention. (Kant UH Second Proposition Reiss ed 1996).

No matter how much a philosopher 'by nature' achieves by his or her own reason, s/he cannot achieve his own "autonomy" independently of "history," or independently of the human species as a whole. What matters is the progress of the whole species towards true autonomy. A philosopher cannot be satisfied by the condition of reason in the species that falls short of this end.

Kant's 'new Socrates' identifies 'criticism' as the proper use of metaphysics. Theoretical reason thus "serves to remove obstacles in the way of religion and virtue" through a critique of speculation, "and which has more to do with dispensing than with acquiring." (KGS XVII, Reflection 4457, p. 558) "Metaphysics is a useful science, not because it extends knowledge, but because it prevents errors. One learns what Socrates knew." (KGS XVII, Reflection 3717, p. 261). For Kant, "metaphysics... is only the correction of the sound understanding and reason." (KGS XVII, Reflection 4284, p. 495). Such notions reflect Kant's reworking of metaphysics. Kant's scientific metaphysics does not pertain to the science of the natural whole. Rather, it is the science of the faculty of reason, bringing theoretical knowledge into harmony with "common reason" through an account of the limits of the former and an affirmation of the 'wisdom' of the latter. "Common reason" furnishes the "wisdom" about the ends which guides the

use of theoretical reason. In this respect, we can characterise Kant's Socratism as an inverted Platonism, retaining Plato's commitment to the true, the good and the beautiful, but seeing the potential for their realisation in the rational faculties innate in each individual and all individuals. Where Plato saw the errors of opinion, *doxa*, Kant sees the 'common reason'. Earlier, I argued that Kant replaced Plato's notion of the philosopher ruler with the democratic notion that philosophy should rule through the attainment of the natural rational ends of the whole species. This view needs qualification. Whilst "wisdom" rules over "science," wisdom is not the preserve of philosophy. Scientific "metaphysics," however, is an instrument which the philosopher employs in order to assist the common reason in realising its ends. This means that the philosopher is distinguished from "common reason" with respect to means only, not with respect to ends. (*KGS XVII*, Reflections 4453,4459; *KGSII*, pp. 368-69.) The democratisation of Plato's philosopher-ruler as the idea that philosophy should rule stands. The role of the philosopher is not to rule but to act as a spur to human self-knowledge, showing human beings how little they need beyond their own innate reason in order to achieve their ends. (*KGS XVII*; Reflections 4453,4459; *KGSII*, pp. 368-69.) The world of Being is immanent in the rational faculties of human beings, the common reason, in the world of Becoming.

Kant, the epitome of the professional philosopher, thus undercuts the claims to superiority of theoretical reason, showing human beings how little they need with respect to theory if they just rely on their common moral reason. (*KGS XXIV*, pp. 212,330.) The Socratic spur to human self-knowledge is also a legislating of the difference between wisdom about ends which arises from common moral reason, and theoretical knowledge or science. (*KGS XVIII*, Reflection 4902).

The question arises as to why the unerring wisdom of the common moral reason should require the metaphysical criticism of the philosopher. What use could such 'criticism' be? There is a need to emphasise here Kant's view of the uniqueness of the modern world: "We live in an age which has not had its like before in the history of the human understanding." (*KGSXVIII*, Reflection 6215, pp. 504-5.) A substantial part of the distinctiveness of the age in which Kant wrote consisted in the extraordinary advances being recorded in the pure theoretical sciences of nature and mathematics. This awareness lies behind the striking passage in *Critique of Practical Reason*.

“Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe .. the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”

Kant (1788). In L. W. Beck ed. 1949: 258.

Unusual for Kant, the words have a poetic ring. Of course, they are not poetry, but refer to Kant's attempts to unify science and morals, the knowledge of external nature and human nature, Newton and Rousseau.

Kant learned from Rousseau to be wary of any attempt to 'enlighten' society through the diffusion of scientific thought throughout society. Reason comes in many forms, not just scientific. Kant was acutely aware, after Rousseau sounded the alarm, of the possible anarchic consequences of the attempt to spread 'enlightenment' by means of just the one form of reason. Kant identifies the central difficulty of the modern age as lying in the "public display" of speculative doctrines which are pernicious to the moral health of society. He writes of the "injurious influence" of philosophic thought in the contemporary world. Kant's criticism here has nothing in common at all with the reactionary rejection of the Enlightenment, quite the contrary. Kant insists that the magnitude of the danger compels us to present an adequate account of the structure of reason, and to develop adequate safeguards of common moral reason. The result is therefore ultimately beneficial to the species as a whole.

Kant is aware of living in times that are without precedent in this regard. Philosophy, what Kant refers to as "scientific" metaphysics, is now responsible for the "lasting welfare" of humankind as a whole, and answerable to the people at the same time. Kant strikes a note here which is untypically dramatic for a philosopher who is normally so dry. Kant states that the modern age is either the dawn of the permanent decline of man, the "complete decay of the human understanding" and "human shape," or is the dawn of a permanent resolution of human problems. (Letters to M. Mendelssohn, April 8, 1766, and J. Lambert, December 31, 1765; also *KGS* XX p 48, lines 1-7, and *KGS* XVIII, Reflection 4936). Doesn't every age put the same alternatives before its people? As a spur to bring about the desirable end state and make the potential for human progress an historical fact? This is crisis as opportunity,

a familiar notion. Kant argues that the way of the crisis of the present age lies in the critique of the rational faculties. The "historical situation" within which Kant found himself was clearly a powerful force behind his "transcendental turn," to the extent that, as was argued earlier, this is based on the requirement that theoretical inquiry is subordinated to the universal "common moral reason" along with the *telos* that accompanies it. It is this subordination which lies behind Kant's transcendental turn, requiring the "horizontal critique" of speculation achieved by means of a "transcendental logic." As a result, the common moral reason is enlightened as to the limits of speculation, and comes to learn and develop its own sufficiency in the moral-teleological realm.

33 KANT AND VIRTUE ETHICS

In the past few decades there has been something of a revival in virtue ethics. As awareness of the inadequacies of utilitarian and deontological ethics has grown, there has been a turn to normative theories whose primary focus is on persons rather than decision-making and consequences. In this normative turn, the emphasis is placed upon agents and the sorts of lives they lead rather than upon atomic acts and the rules for making choices, even less the consequences of such acts. The proponents of virtue ethics thus differentiate their normative approach from the two dominant forms of modern ethics — utilitarianism and deontology. In this normative turn, the characters of agents and their morally relevant traits matter more than laws of obligation.

It would appear that Kant has nothing to offer this recovery of virtue ethics. Indeed, as the first moral theorist to place a non-derivative conception of duty at the centre of the philosophical stage and the first to establish a non-consequentialist decision procedure through his universalisability test, Kant can be considered the philosopher most responsible for the turn away from virtue ethics. In this reading, Kant is the first and the greatest philosopher of deontology. (This may be true, but there is much more to Kant than this, as will be argued shortly.) Further, whilst contemporary communitarian philosophers such as Michael Sandel are attempting attempt to reinstate the warm, affective ties of individuals within community, Kant is associated with Enlightenment efforts to emancipate the individual from such

ties and from the pull of traditions and communities. Kant's universalistic conception of morality is considered asocial and ahistorical for this reason, a deficiency which Hegel sought to remedy in his conception of *Sittlichkeit*.

There are, then, conceptual as well as historical reasons as to why Kant is considered by virtue theorists to be a, and maybe even *the*, principal target for criticism. In arguing that only actions done 'from duty' possess moral worth and exhibit a good will (Kant GMM 1991:62/5 1956:84 85 37/8 DV 1964:50 52/3 R 1960:25), Kant has been criticised by both neo-Kantians (Rawls) and anti-Kantians (Sandel) for being indifferent to ends. For Kant, to act 'from duty' is to act out of respect for the moral law rather than from inclination or from expectation of desirable consequences (GMM 1991:66). In the words of communitarian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre: 'In Kant's moral writings we have reached a point at which the notion that morality is anything other than obedience to rules has almost, if not quite, disappeared from sight'. (MacIntyre 1981:219. Cf. 42,112.

This is a charge with which anyone acquainted with Hegel will be familiar. Hegel criticised Kant's morality as an 'empty formalism'. For Hegel, Kant's purely formal standard of universality cannot generate substantive social and political prescriptions and is therefore unable to provide an 'immanent doctrine of duties'.

Against the abstract or external Kantian morality of duty, formalised as a morality of rules and codes, Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical life, offers an embodied morality that proceeds within a thick welter of institutions and relations of 'concrete freedom'. Where Kant offers morality as a set of formal practices and procedures, Hegel's ethical life is rooted in the very fabric of the community, in its way of life, but builds up to the universality of the state (Wood 1990:206). Hegel's distinctive claim in this respect is that the duties of the individual form part of the rational social order, achieving freedom not from, but through the institutional fabric of human life (PR para 149). This fabric 'is my own objectivity, in the true sense, which I fulfil in doing my duty: in doing my duty, I am with myself and free' (PR para 133A).

From this perspective, Hegel rather than Kant would seem to offer more to those attempting to develop a virtue ethics relevant to the modern age. (I argue precisely this in *Marx and Rational Freedom* 2001).

For Hegel, Kant's pure motive of duty can never produce the good since it is abstracted from the real desires, interests, and needs of real individuals. There is simply no way of bracketing out the characters of the agents in the way required by Kant. Instead, Hegel demands that the good be made an integral part of the everyday empirical life of individuals. Here, he follows Aristotle's conception of a virtue as an intelligent disposition to behave in certain ways and act for certain reasons through feeling pleasure or pain at certain things (Hegel PR para 150R; Aristotle NE 1980:35/9). For Hegel, this Aristotelian virtue transcends Kant's dualism of duty and inclination.

Aristotle determines the concept of virtue more precisely by distinguishing a rational aspect of the soul from an irrational one; in the latter nous [reason] is only *dynamai* [potentially] - sensations, inclinations, passions, emotions apply to it. In the rational side, understanding, wisdom, reflectiveness, cognizance all have their place. But they do not constitute virtue, which consists only in the unity of the rational with the irrational side. We call it virtue when the passions (inclinations) are so related to reason that they do what reason commands.

HP 2 1969:204).

The current normative turn, involving virtue ethics, is going in the way of Hegel against Kant. Philippa Foot singles out Kant for particular criticism in being one of the key philosophers whose 'tacitly accepted opinion was that a study of the topic [of the virtues and vices] would form no part of the fundamental work of ethics'. (Foot 1978: 1).

On this reasoning, far from having anything to contribute to virtue ethics, Kant is the philosopher who is most responsible for philosophy's subsequent neglect of virtue. In treating agents in abstraction from character, Kantian moral philosophy stands charged with not only misrepresents persons but also morality and practical

deliberation. (Williams 1981: pp. 14, 19.) In fine, to say the very least, Kant's deontological rule ethics perspective is considered by a large body of philosophical opinion to be primarily responsible for the abandonment of agent-centred ethics. I myself have argued strongly for the superiority of Hegel's embodied social ethics in this respect, whilst at the same time pointing out that Hegel's criticism of Kant's 'duty for the sake of duty' is a half-truth. (Peter Critchley *Marx and Rational Freedom* 2001). Which means that there is more to Kant than an 'empty formalism'. The criticisms that have been made of Kant are valid only if the categorical imperative is identified with the Formula of Universal Law, emphasising the universality of its form. Whilst Kant's morality is formal, it is not empty. Contrary to the claims of critics, Kant is not indifferent to ends. The imperative to treat humanity as an end and never as a means puts some 'nonheteronomous teleological flesh' upon 'the bare bones of universality' (Riley 1982:49). As a result, Kant's standard of universalisation is not left adrift but is instead attached to an ethic which imposes the duty upon each to treat all others with the respect they expect to receive in return. This has practical implications, ruling out all those institutions and practices which treat human beings as means to external ends.

I would therefore argue that Kant's deontological rule ethics can at least accommodate a virtue ethics, and may even presuppose some such ethics. That this could be taken to be a striking claim suggests that Kant has been read too one-sidedly as a rule ethics. Kant took a keen interest in virtue. It should be remembered that Kant wrote a substantial work entitled *The Doctrine of Virtue* (1797).

The Doctrine of Virtue is the key text which supports the interpretation of Kant's philosophy as a practical ethics. The work forms the second part of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* and represents the culmination of the ethical questions which Kant had been grappling with for years. Despite being central to Kant's work, *The Doctrine of Virtue* has been neglected since it was written.

In giving this work the critical attention it merits, Kantian philosopher Gary Banham is laying the foundation for a major reinterpretation of Kant, at long setting Kant in his true light. Banham defines Kantian virtue as a combination of teleology with perfectionism.

In the prefatory material to the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant makes the clear case for viewing ethical considerations in terms of teleological standards that involve an orientation towards perfectionism. Kant contrasts the Doctrine of Right with the Doctrine of Virtue and comments:

The doctrine of right dealt only with the *formal* condition of outer freedom (the consistency of outer freedom with itself if its maxim were made universal law), that is, with **right**. But ethics goes beyond this and provides a *matter* (an object of free choice), an **end** of pure reason which it represents as an end that is also objectively necessary, that is, an end that, as far as human beings are concerned, it is a duty to have. (Ak. 6:380)

Gary Banham spells out precisely what this means:

The distinction between the treatment of right and that of virtue involves two different elements. First, whilst the treatment of right is concerned only with *formal* conditions, the treatment of virtue concerns *matters* of choice or objects of choice. Second, the treatment of right is purely in relation to outer freedom but since the treatment of virtue is related to the activity of choice of objects for the will it must include within its province inner freedom or the setting of ends. This concentration on ends is constitutive of the treatment of virtue. It marks Kant's ethics as teleological.

Banham 2006:181/2

In setting out his ethical position, then, Kant is necessarily concerned with purposes, but not purposes as such, only particular types of purpose, namely purposes that it is a duty to have. In describing ethics as 'the system of the *ends* of pure practical reason' (Ak. 6:381), Kant makes it clear that ends that are also duties are the province of the account of virtue. This statement makes it clear that Kant understood his 'treatment of moral philosophy in his critical works is no more than a propaedeutic to the discussion of ethics proper, a discussion conducted necessarily in terms of ends.'

(Banham 2006: 182). This does not mean that ends are treated as a pre-existent given to which the categorical imperative is expected to adapt. There was such an adaptation of the principles of morality to ends in the Doctrine of Right, with an allowance that ends could be selected according to whatever principle a person wished, so long as these ends in execution conformed to a general rule of conduct. The situation is different with respect to ethics. In ethics 'the *concept of duty* will lead to ends and will have to establish *maxims* with respect to ends we *ought* to set ourselves' (Ak. 6:382). 'So the categorical imperative has to enable us to think of how to connect the concept of duty with that of an end in general.' (Banham 2006 182). In sum, Banham's achievement is to have set 'the discussions of the Doctrine of Virtue into closer relation to the discussions of the Doctrine of Right in order to provide a unitary conception of Kant's practical doctrine and to relate this to the key notions of his critique of morality.' (Banham 2006: 211).

Banham's book is a substantial piece of work that recovers Kantian ethics and practical philosophy and has the potential not only to reorient moral philosophy but to change the world for the better. It gives us a Kant that the world is crying out for. Rather than discuss the book further, I recommend that readers go direct and read it for themselves:

Gary Banham *Kant's Practical Philosophy From Critique to Doctrine* 2006
Palgrave

Among moral attributes true virtue alone is sublime.

Kant 1965: 57

[I]t is only by means of this idea [of virtue] that any judgment as to moral worth or its opposite is possible . . .

Kant CPR 1982 A 315/B 372

But all good enterprises which are not grafted on to a morally good attitude of mind are nothing but illusion and outwardly glittering misery.

UH Reiss ed 1996:49

For Kant, then, whatever is not based on morally good disposition is merely pretence and glittering misery.

It should not be too difficult, then, to argue the relevance of Kant to the contemporary recovery of virtue ethics. Indeed, I would argue that a proper understanding of Kant on this issue would serve to strengthen virtue ethics markedly. I have argued that Kant's achievement lies in redeeming the greatest philosophical ideals of antiquity within the modern terrain. This view applies also to virtue.

The best work in this area has been done by Onora O'Neill. O'Neill responded immediately to MacIntyre's charges in her 'Kant After Virtue' (1984). Here, O'Neill argues in the most forthright terms that 'what is not in doubt... is that Kant offers primarily an ethic of virtue rather than an ethic of rules'. (O'Neill 1984: 397. Cf. 396) Warner Wick also stresses the prominence of virtue in Kant's moral philosophy, but not in O'Neill's strident terms of virtue against rules. (Wick 1983).

There is no necessary reason why a rule ethic and a virtue ethic should be mutually exclusive alternatives in the work of Kant. In response to criticisms from a certain Professor Garve, Kant spells out his position clearly, identifying duty with virtue.

I had provisionally designated the study of morals as the introduction to a discipline which would teach us not how to be happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness. Nor had I omitted to point out at the same time that man is not thereby expected to *renounce* his natural aim of attaining happiness as soon as the question of following his duty arises; for like any finite rational being, he simply cannot do so. Instead, he must completely *abstract* from such considerations as soon as the imperative of duty supervenes, and must on no account make them a *condition* of his obeying the law prescribed to him by reason. He must indeed make every possible conscious effort to ensure that no *motive* derived from the desire for

happiness imperceptibly infiltrates his conceptions of duty. To do this, he should think rather of the sacrifices which obedience to duty (i.e. virtue) entails than of the benefits he might reap from it, so that he will comprehend the imperative of duty in its full authority as a self-sufficient law, independent of all other influences, which requires unconditional obedience.

Kant TP Reiss ed 1996: 64

I shall argue that we do not need to choose between rules or virtue and that Kant's morality is able to combine both equally.

Kant's work on virtue has been underdeveloped, with the dominant emphasis coming to be placed on his deontological rules ethic. Recovering Kant's conception of the virtues goes some way towards correcting the view that sees Kant's morality as an empty formalism. Kant sought to build an ethical theory based not just on rules but upon agents and the kinds of lives they lead. Kant's ethics thus paid close attention to both the life plans of moral agents and to their discrete acts. Kant's great achievement was to have created a moral theory which combined rule ethics and virtue ethics.

The most salient characteristic of virtue ethics is its strong agent orientation. In virtue ethics, the agent is the *primary* object of moral evaluation, not the intentional act or its consequences. Virtue ethics proceeds from the notion of the morally good person. This person is not defined in terms of performing obligatory acts ('the person who acts as duty requires') or end-states ('the agent who is disposed to maximise utility through his acts'). Rather, whether acts are right or wrong is conceived according to what the good agent would or would not do. Ends are considered worthy or unworthy according to what the good agent would or would not aim at. It follows from this that virtue ethics is based on a conceptual shift in which 'being' receives greater prominence than 'doing'. The character of the agent rather than the act and its consequences are the primary focus. Virtue ethics is thus an agent-ethics rather than an act-ethics. Where virtue theorists are concerned with the character of agents and the kinds of lives they lead,

act theorists focus on discrete acts and are therefore more concerned with formulating decision procedures for making practical choices.

Agent ethics and act ethics also advance different views with respect to moral motivation. The difficulty of any attempt to read Kantian ethics as a virtue ethics *as such* becomes apparent here. Kant is on both sides of the divide, as a duty-based or deontological theorist, whose preferred motivation factor is respect for the idea of duty itself, duty being done for the sake of duty, and as a virtue theorist whose preferred motive is neither duty nor utility but the virtues themselves. (Kant 1959, 9, Ak. 393.) Moving away from rules as guiding acts and consequences of acts, the same act comes to be evaluated differently according to the motivations of the agent. The agent who acts from dispositions of friendship, courage or integrity is held to be morally higher than the person who performs the same acts but from other motives, whether with respect to utility or consequences. Character and kinds of life matter.

The Good Will

Kant builds his moral position on the need for ‘the good will’ linked to ‘character’:

It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*. Intelligence, wit, judgement, and any other *talents* of the mind we may care to name, or courage, resolution, and constancy of purpose, as qualities of *temperament*, are without doubt good and desirable in many respects; but they can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will is not good which has to make use of these gifts of nature, and which for this reason has the term '*character*' applied to its peculiar quality.

Kant GMM 1991:60

Kant continues that ‘power, wealth, honour, even health and that complete well-being and contentment with one's state which goes by the name of '*happiness*' produce only ‘boldness’ and even ‘over-boldness’, ‘unless a good will is present by which their influence on the mind—and so too the whole principle of action—may be

corrected and adjusted to universal ends' (Kant GMM 1991:60). Kant therefore concludes that 'a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of our very worthiness to be happy.' (Kant GMM 1991:60).

Kant's position on the good will would seem to be clear evidence of an agent-centred ethics as against an act-centred ethics. This contradicts the familiar view of Kant as a rules-centred deontologist. Robert Paul Wolff remarks that it is 'noteworthy that the philosopher most completely identified with the doctrine of stern duty should begin, not with a statement about what we ought to do, but rather with a judgment of what is unqualifiedly good'. (Wolff 1973: 56-7.) Further, it is clear that what counts as unqualifiedly good for Kant is not some end-state like pleasure or the performance of certain discrete acts in conformity to rules, but a condition of 'character' forming the basis for all of a person's actions. Thus, the question of 'the good will' can never be answered with certainty given the opacity of our intentions. Instead, it is necessary to look beyond discrete acts and decisions and instead assess the lives that agents live. For Kant, a person cannot be 'morally good in some ways and at the same time morally evil in others'. (Kant 1960: 20.) Likewise, a person cannot exhibit a good will in one instance and an evil in another. A steadfastness of character must be apparent at all times.

It follows from Kant's assertion of the unqualified goodness of the good will that agents rather than acts must be fundamentally important in his ethical position. This begs the question of the relationship of 'good will' to virtue. In *The Doctrine of Virtue*, the *Tugendlehre*, Kant defines virtue (*Tugend*) as 'fortitude in relation to the forces opposing a moral attitude of will in us'. (Kant DV 1964: 38, Ak. 380.) A good will is one which constantly acts from the motive of respect for the moral law. As natural beings, however, human beings always possess urges and inclinations which may lead them to act contrary to reason. Human wills are therefore in a perpetual state of tension. It follows from this that the virtuous agent is one who, on account of his or her 'fortitude', is able to resist and rise above those natural urges and inclinations which are opposed to the moral law. This 'fortitude' is strength (*Starke*) or force (*Kraft*) of will, (Kant DV 1964: 49-50, Ak. 389, 54/393, 58/397, 66/4114, 70—1/408—9; Kant 1974: 26-7, Ak. 147; Kant 1963: 73.) not in terms of the ability to accomplish the goals one sets out to

achieve, but in terms of achieving mastery over one's inclinations and constancy of purpose. (Kant 1959 10, Ak. 394.)

Whilst some wills are better than others, only a holy will, with no wants that are contrary to reason, possesses an absolutely good will. Kant thus concludes that 'human morality in its highest stages can still be nothing more than virtue'. (Kant 1964: 41, Ak. 382.; CPR 1956, 86-7, Ak. 84-5; Kant 1959: 30-1, Ak. 414.)

Given the inherent conflict in human wills, virtue is only an approximation of the good will. Kant's virtuous agent is therefore a human approximation of a good will who, through strength of mind, continually acts out of respect for the moral law while nevertheless being subject to the presence of those natural inclinations which could lead him to act from other motives.

Having established the good will as the only unqualified good for Kant, and having defined virtue as the human approximation to the good will, one can conclude that moral virtue is foundational for Kant, and not a concept of merely derivative or secondary importance, as it is in strictly deontological theory. Kant expresses himself very clearly in favour of a morally good disposition: 'But all good enterprises which are not grafted on to a morally good attitude of mind are nothing but illusion and outwardly glittering misery.' From this perspective, 'the essence of [Kant's] moral philosophy is quite different from what it has commonly been supposed to be, for on the basis of this enquiry one must conclude that it is the concept of the good will that lies at its foundation'. (Harbison 1980: 59.)

However, Kant's philosophy cannot be read as a virtue ethics alone. There is little to be gained from bending a stick that has gone too far in one direction, too far back in the other direction. There is much more to Kant's ethical position than this rules versus virtue antagonism. Kant defines both the good will and virtue in terms of obedience to moral law; they are both wills which conform to the moral law and act out of respect for the moral law. In beginning with the good will, Kant is attempting to discern 'the supreme principle of morality'. This is the categorical imperative. Which means that if virtue is defined in terms of conformity to the moral law and the

categorical imperative, then it follows that after all it is obedience to rules that is primary in Kantian ethics, not virtue.

There is, however, a sense in which we have divided Kant's ethical position from within, creating a false antithesis which forces us to choose between duty for duty's sake or virtue for virtue's sake. Neither position captures the essence of Kant's ethical position.

As the basis for all judgments of moral worth, virtue constitutes the heart of the ethical in Kant's view. However, Kant goes on to define this virtue according to the moral law, the supreme principle of morality. Virtue ethics places the emphasis upon agency and long-term characteristic behaviour rather than discrete acts and decision procedures for moral quandaries. However, what matters most of all for Kant is that moral agency acts consistently out of respect for the moral law, not merely in terms of following specific rules for specific acts, but in the more fundamental terms of the person guiding his or her whole life out of respect for rationally legislated and willed law.

It is now possible to see where the difficulty in interpretation lies. Kant's ethical position is subtle, profound and genuinely ground breaking. Kant is able to accommodate both rules and virtue and thereby avoid the simplistic either/or positions both his advocates and his critics adopt. In subordinating virtue to the moral law, Kant *seems* clearly to be a deontological obedience-to-rules theorist pure and simple. Except there is nothing simple about Kant's position at all. Kant advocates obedience to rules not in the empty, thin, duty for duty's sake manner for which virtue theorists routinely castigate rule ethics. That's how Kant *can* be interpreted – and has been interpreted – but it is not Kant's fully developed position. Rather, Kant is beyond this antithesis of rule ethics and virtue ethics in setting virtue in relation to the moral law to define obedience in the broader, richer sense of living a life in accordance with reason. Kant's conception of the good will thus combines agent and rule so that the virtuous agent is one who consistently 'follows the rules' out of respect for the idea of rationally legislated law. But whilst 'the rules' do indeed serve as guides to action, they are conceived by Kant most fundamentally as life-guides.

Re-reading Kant's Maxims

Viewing Kant as a virtue theorist requires a re-interpretation of what Kant means by a maxim. (O'Neill, 'Kant After Virtue', and 'Consistency in Action', in Potter and Timmons (eds) 1984: Hoffe in Hoffe ed 1979: pp. 90-2.) Kant's curt definition of a maxim is as a 'subjective principle of volition'. (Kant, *Foundations*, 17, Ak. 401, n. 1; 38/420, n. 8). From this it follows that a maxim is a policy of action which a particular agent adopts at a particular time and place. Since the principle is subjective rather than objective, it fits the agent's own intentions and interests. If we interpret Kant's maxims as the agent's specific maxims for discrete acts, we proceed inexorably to the rule interpretation of maxims, a maxim as a rule which prescribes or proscribes a specific act. This is what O'Neill is determined to reject, arguing instead that 'it seems most convincing to understand by an agent's maxim the *underlying intention* by which the agent orchestrates his numerous more specific intentions'. (O'Neill *Kant After Virtue* 1984 : 394)

If, following O'Neill, we interpret Kant's maxims as underlying intentions rather than as specific intentions, then the path is cleared for an interpretation of Kant's ethics as a virtue ethics. For the underlying intentions of an agent are inextricably bound up with the sort of person the agent is and the kind of life the agent lives. And the kind of person an agent is clearly depends upon what virtues and vices an agent possesses. In contrast, the specific intentions of an agent are not always an accurate guide to the kind of person that agent is 'deep down inside'. Both O'Neill and Hoffe emphasise this connection between underlying intentions and being a certain sort of person. (O'Neill, 395; Hoffe, 91).

Kant cautions us against understanding virtue as a 'mere aptitude (*Fertigkeit*) or ... a long-standing habit (*Gewohnheit*) of morally good actions'. (Kant 1964: 41-2, Ak. 383, 69/407). Here, Kant is concerned to emphasise that human virtue is a valuable but precarious achievement of pure practical reason. To preserve it, we must be constantly on our guard against heteronomy and empirical inclinations. It has to be regretted here that, in making these points, Kant engages in a criticism of Aristotle which sees little of positive value in Aristotle's own virtue ethics and, frankly, profoundly misunderstands Aristotle. I think that Kant is closer to Aristotle on this point than he himself realises.

Kant conceives virtue to be more than a mechanical habit, something one acquires through repeated practice, but as a state of character determined by a rational principle. Most of all, Kant wants to secure the definition of virtue as a moral disposition 'armed for all situations' and 'insured against changes that new temptations can bring about'. (Kant 1964 42, Ak. 383). As has been argued above, Kant did not seek to return to or repeat the philosophical ideals of antiquity but to realise them on a distinctively modern terrain. And here, it is clear that Kant is attempting not to recover the virtue ethics of antiquity, a nostalgic project doomed to failure, but to define a conception of virtue which is appropriate to the modern age, a virtue which is equipped to deal with the atomisation of modern society and the concomitant breakdown of communities, solidarities and institutions. Kant's sensitivity to understanding virtue as the cultivation of habits is explained by his awareness of the human capacity for self-deception and rationalisation. This possibly explains why he misunderstood Aristotle so badly, believing that Aristotle himself had argued for virtue as mechanical habit. Emphasising that the good will is the achievement of pure practical reason, Kant has no truck with a view which invites a degeneration into mechanical habits.

The Doctrine of Morally Necessary Ends

The clearest evidence for the centrality of virtue in Kant's ethical position is provided by his doctrine of morally necessary ends in *The Doctrine of Virtue*. (Kant 1964, Introduction, Section 3, 'On the Ground for Conceiving an End which is at the Same Time a Duty'.) Here, Kant argues that all acts have ends, since action (by definition) is a goal-directed process. Ends, however, are objects of free choice. Kant recognises that human beings have many desires, wants and inclinations which are biologically and/or culturally imposed, and therefore that nearly all ends adopted are also objects of desires, wants and inclinations. However, since we cannot be forced to make anything an end of action unless we ourselves choose to, it follows that our ends, ultimately, are chosen. Individuals can and do renounce even the biological desire for life in certain circumstances. This book is grounded in the example of Socrates as an example of moral choice which transcends natural determinism. Since the adoption of ends is a matter of free choice, Kant reasons, they are a matter of pure practical reason rather than of natural inclination.

So how does Kant balance free choice with the obligation to obey the moral law? Kant argues for freely chosen ends which are morally necessary. Agents therefore have a duty to adopt certain ends. It is clear that Kant holds a conception of the good which is more than subjective individual preference. Kant is not neutral on the good, a view which leaves individuals free to define the good as they see fit. This being the case, individualist liberals could easily denounce Kant's notion of free choice as illiberal. Kant seems to be distinguishing individual conceptions of the good from a singular conception of *the* good as given by the moral law and discerned by reason, placing the latter on a much more exalted plain than the former. This runs entirely against the neo-Kantian position defined by the likes of John Rawls, who argues explicitly for the priority of right over the good. For reasons given above, Kant allows us to have both right and the good, rules and virtue. Kant consistently pushed against the boundaries between the moral and the empirical. As has been argued, Kant's morality as duty is comprehensible only when it is placed within a larger framework designed to give meaning to individual existence. Kant is keenly concerned with the moral dispositions of agents and the kinds of lives they lead. Such a concern begs, and receives in Kant, a vision of the good life, the very thing which contemporary liberals like Rawls exclude (Rawls 1971). (see Peter Critchley *Reason, Freedom and Modernity* 2001 vol 2 The Philosophical Origins of Rational Freedom; *Reason, Freedom and Modernity* 2001 vol 4 The Good Life).

Whatever the contemporary deontological liberal attempts to redefine Kant as neutral on the good, Kant's own position is clear: the existence of morally necessary ends are crucial to moral philosophy. Morally necessary ends exist. The good life lies in our choosing these ends as a matter of free choice, guided by reason. Kant argues that the abandonment of morally necessary ends 'would do away with all moral philosophy'. (Kant 1964 43, Ak. 384). MacIntyre's critique of modernity in *After Virtue* would be written by Kant as *After Morality*. As Roger Trigg argues, 'morality matters' (Trigg 2005) and to Kant ends are absolutely crucial to morality as such. Kant's reasoning is that all ends which are necessary are categorical. If all ends are contingent, then all imperatives cease to be categorical and instead become hypothetical. And this would spell the end of moral philosophy. The reduction of morality to being 'value judgements' in the modern world amounts to the eclipse of ethics. If individuals are

free to accept or reject any end put before them according to their own specific inclinations, then it follows that all commands prescribing maxims for actions are similarly open to rejection. And once morally necessary ends are abandoned, inclinations take the place of reason. The moral law is no longer recognised and morality no longer exists. 'Value judgements' do not constitute a morality, they are a mere congeries of subjective preferences and opinions based on desire, want and inclination. (Neiman 2009; Oderberg 2000).

To see why morally necessary ends are crucial to moral philosophy, we need to see how questions of reason, freedom, the good, and the moral law tie up in Kant's developed ethical position.

Kant argues in *The Doctrine of Virtue* that there are two ends which agents have a duty to adopt: their own perfection and the happiness of others.

Of the two, the duty which agents have to promote their own perfection is most fundamental and the one most directly connected to moral character. Components of the duty of self-perfection include the cultivation of one's 'natural powers', namely powers of 'mind, soul, and body'. The most important component of this duty, however, is the obligation to cultivate one's will 'to the purest attitude of virtue'. (Kant 1964 46, Ak. 386). As was seen earlier, Kant conceives the good will as the only unqualified good in the world or beyond it, and as establishing the condition for the goodness of all other things. As finite rational intelligences, the highest practical vocation of human beings is to produce the good will, a will that is good in itself, as an unconditional end, for the reason that such a will is the supreme good and, as such, is the ordering principle for all human activities. It was also argued earlier that, for Kant, virtue is a human approximation to the good will. Human beings, on account of their biological and cultural constitution, are always subject to inclinations which are contrary to the moral law. Reason guides us beyond these inclinations towards the morally necessary ends in conformity to the moral law.

Virtue and the Good

It seems clear that virtue plays a much greater role in Kant's ethics than those who read Kant's ethics as a rule ethics pure and simple would presume. This does

not mean, however, that Kant's ethics is a virtue ethics. It is more accurate to argue that Kant combines both rule and virtue ethics in an ethical position that is more than both. Both agent and act perspectives form a significant part of Kant's ethical theory. I have tried to correct the dominant reading of Kant as a deontological rule ethics that is silent on the good. Whilst Rawlsian liberalism fits the contemporary demoralised modern world in which right prevails over good, this was not Kant's position at all on ethics. At the core of Kant's ethics is the moral requirement to transform society to realise the highest good: 'The moral law .. determines for us . . . a final purpose toward which it obliges us to strive, and this purpose is the highest good in the world possible through freedom' (CJ 1951:30). For Kant, human beings 'are a priori determined by reason to promote with all our powers the *summum bonnum*, which consists in the combination of the greatest welfare of rational beings with the highest condition of the good itself, i.e., in universal happiness conjoined with morality most accordant to law' (CJ 1951:304). Kant's notion of the good connects directly with virtue, his ethical theory thus assessing not merely discrete acts but most of all agents' characters and ways of life.

In my *vive voce* I made the mistake of arguing that Kant, ultimately, is agnostic on the good. I had been misled by deontological liberals and marxist critics influenced by Hegel. I was immediately taken to task on the point by a Kantian philosopher of some repute, who quoted the passage above and expressed his 'surprise' that I had missed it. In my defence, I am not alone in making the mistake. And it is not a mistake I would make again.

Kant's Achievement

It is impossible to underestimate the scale of Kant's achievement. In *The History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell opines that 'Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is generally considered the greatest of modern philosophers. I cannot myself agree with this estimate, but it would be foolish not to recognize his great importance' (Russell 1946: 731). Talk about being damned by faint praise. Comparisons are always invidious, but I can't think of a modern philosopher who could be considered better than Kant.

Kant's achievement is immense, effectively bringing to fruition all the hopes of ancient philosophy in a way that responds to and resolves the key problems of the modern world. Kant achieves the unity of humankind on the plane of reason, of a reason forever denuded of its speculative ambition. Even on the foundation of the fundamental moral soundness of Socratic wisdom, ancient philosophy could not have conceived of such unification, given its deficient accounts of the unity of nature. Kant's achievement is to have demonstrated that this unity emerges from within reason itself. Unity arises from reason's own legislation; it is reason's own self-legislation that unifies humankind. Kant points to a reason which grows beyond nature. Such reason does not conform to nature, following its "leading-strings", but grows beyond nature.

The examples of mathematics and natural science, which by a single and sudden revolution have become what they now are, seem to me sufficiently remarkable to suggest our considering what may have been the essential features in the changed point of view by which they have so greatly benefited. Their success should incline us, at least by way of experiment, to imitate their procedure, so far as the analogy which, as species of rational knowledge, they bear to metaphysics may permit. Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.

CPR, B xvi.

A new light flashed upon the mind of the first man (be he Thales or some other) who demonstrated the properties of the isosceles triangle. The true method, so he found, was not to inspect what he discerned either in the figure, or in the bare concept of it, and from this, as it were, to read off its properties; but to bring out what was necessarily implied in the concepts that he had himself formed *a priori*, and had put into the figure in the construction by which he presented it to himself. If he is to know anything with *a priori* certainty he must not ascribe to

the figure anything save what necessarily follows from what he has himself set into it in accordance with his concept.

CPR, B xiii

By conformity to the object, Kant means conformity to nature. This merely generates the illusions of fundamental heterogeneity, including the apparent heterogeneity of the natures of philosopher and nonphilosopher. Kant is clear that reason must be one within the species as a whole. If reason is to legislate unity, it must itself be unified. The reason which is one in the species is "to be found in that reason with which every human being is endowed." (A 839/8 867). There can therefore be no natural differences in kind between human beings, between philosophers and nonphilosophers, only differences in the degree to which human beings have approached the end of their rational nature. The philosopher as such undertakes theoretical inquiry out of duty: "Moreover, the resolution of all our transcendent knowledge into its elements... to the philosopher is indeed a matter of duty" (CPR A 703/6 731; cf. *ibid.*, A 726/8 754). The duty of the philosopher is to goad human beings to use the reason that is their birthright. In locating the "idea of the legislation" of the philosopher in the reason that is innate to all human beings, Kant democratises philosophy, holding out the prospect that each man and each woman can become a philosopher, thus bringing the species as a whole to its natural rational end.

REASON AND LABOUR AS SELF-CREATION

34 HEGEL – OBJECTIFICATION AND ALIENATION

Kant laid the groundwork for Hegel's philosophy, since he met the assault of empirical philosophy head on and developed a new and powerful 'idealist'

philosophy of mind and world. Convinced by Kant that the basic idealist position was strong and compelling, Hegel proceeded to develop a philosophical system which held that mind and world were one. Hegel's vast theory of the unfolding of reason throughout human history took Kantian idealism well beyond Kant.

We may now turn to Hegel's philosophy itself.

The two central concepts in Hegel's philosophy are 'Spirit' (*Geist*) and 'the Idea' (*Idee*). *Geist* is 'the human spirit or essence' and *Idee* as 'thought or reason'. These two concepts are intimately connected, because what distinguishes human beings, what is their 'spirit' or 'essence' is their capacity for thought or reason.

However, Hegel's major development of idealist philosophy after Kant lay in his insistence that both spirit – *Geist* - and thought or reason - 'the Idea' - have a *history*. Spirit and Idea develop and grow over time. History is the progress of reason to the consciousness of freedom. This means that the human capacity for reason, the human understanding, grows and expands, deepens, through time, ultimately leading to freedom, coming to know the world as a product of reason. Human history, for Hegel, is the history of that development of reason. Hegel went further than this, arguing not only that mind and world are one (since the world can be known only through the mind), but that *mind actually creates the world*. Hegel argues the truth of this claim in two ways:

1. Since 'the world' for Hegel means 'knowledge of the world' through the mind, then as mind develops, knowledge changes and the world changes in accordance.
2. Since human beings act in the world on the basis of their knowledge of it, the world becomes increasingly shaped and dominated by reason through human activity conducted on the basis of reason. This form of activity becomes increasingly predominant as the human species progresses to freedom.

All human artefacts, from the most humble (tables, chairs, pens) to the most grand (towns and cities, the economy, the state) are 'objectifications' of human reason. That is, human artefacts embody reason. The physical organization of our towns and cities, our economy (what Hegel calls the 'system of needs'), our political

system, forms one reasonable or rational system. The organization of the world around us is the embodiment of reason, the physical expression of human reason at work. This means that the visible world so beloved of our barbarian metaphysicians of common sense is constituted by reason. The 'real world' is mind infused matter. To be free is to be rational, it is to apprehend the invisible within the visible, as it constitutes the visible.

Human beings hardly appear at all, as actual subjects, in Hegel's pure philosophy, as contained in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The reason for this is that Hegel places the accent on 'mind' (reason, thought) as the essential thing which all human beings have in common. Mind is what makes human beings human. Further, the categories of thought are universal in being the same for all human minds. For Hegel, the world is the creation, the product, of these universal categories of thought. From this it follows that the working life of an individual is the product or the 'embodiment' of the *idea* of work, something which applies with respect to all particular forms of work – administration, sales, library assistant, coal mining – and human activity in general. All forms of activity are the embodiments of the *ideas* of each activity. The political activity of the citizen is the product or the 'embodiment' of the *idea* of 'politics' or the 'public realm'. The state is the product or embodiment of the *idea* of 'public spiritedness', the bureaucracy is the embodiment of the *idea* of 'rational objectivity'.

Hegel's philosophy is idealistic, but this does not mean that Hegel is committed to the view that the world is 'nothing but' ideas. Marx got a lot of mileage from the view that Hegel inverted the true relation between the ideal and the real, making the real world 'nothing but' a manifestation of ideas.

Thus sovereignty, the essence of the state, is first objectified and conceived as something independent. Then, of course, this object must again become a subject. This subject, however, becomes manifest as the self-embodiment of sovereignty, whereas [in fact] sovereignty is nothing but the objectified spirit of the subjects of the state.

Marx EW CHDS 1975).

To the extent that Marx is drawing attention to the dangers of investing ideas with a reality that they do not possess, to the detriment of real things and real people, the point is well made. But the criticism doesn't apply to Hegel. Hegel's argument that ideas are embodied in the real world doesn't imply that the real world is nothing but ideas or that the real is no more than a deduction from the ideal. The problem with Marx's critique of Hegel is that once he starts to pursue the line that for Hegel the real is 'nothing but' a manifestation of the ideal, he inflates the point to lose all contact with what Hegel was actually arguing: 'The Idea of the *sovereign power*, of the crown, as expounded by Hegel is nothing but the *Idea* of *caprice*, of the *decision* of the *will*. (Marx EW CHDS 1975). Now, ideas are 'nothing but' other ideas. Marx uses the phrase 'nothing but' eighteen times in his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*. This reductive language is employed by Marx to prove his central claim that Hegel inverts true relations by deriving empirical institutions (the state, the family etc.) from *the Idea*.

Marx is wrong about this, and is wrong in a way that undermines his own philosophy. Where Marx put labour as the demiurge of empirical institutions, Hegel put reason. Hegel's emphasis on the *Idea* unfolding throughout history points to creative human agency progressing towards the consciousness of freedom, coming to understand empirical institutions as a human product. As indeed they are in being the embodiments of reason, evincing rational purpose and structure. It was only a short step from here to Marx's emphasis upon labour as human self-creation. But this labour is conscious labour, it involves reason, ideas, with the result that the human world is shot through with human purpose, consciousness, will, design, intention. The task is to appreciate this fact. That was Hegel's point, missed by Marx, and it was also Marx's own point.

Hegel's argument is organised around the concepts of *objectification* and *alienation*. Human history is a process in which ideas are objectified in material reality, so that the things of the empirical world are always embodiments of reason. Thus, the idea of 'shelter' is objectified into houses, the idea of 'communication' is objectified into telephones, emails etc, the idea of 'transport' is objectified into roads, railways, buses, cars. And the idea of a 'general interest of society' is objectified into the institutions of the state. Hegel has been criticised as a philosopher who glorified the power of the state. It is easy to find statements in

Hegel which would support this view: ‘The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth’ Hegel writes in *The Philosophy of History*. Such language is jarring to liberal sensitivities. The idolatry of the state has been seen at its murderous worst too many times for us to not to recoil from such language. But when Hegel argues that ‘the State is the actually existing realized moral life’ (PH), we should read this not as the deification of the state as such but as the realisation of the moral life enabling us to realise our innate moral potentialities. That, surely, has been the aim of philosophising since Socrates. Hegel was concerned with how the moral ideal could be embodied in a viable, functioning social order.

The State is the embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognising itself in an objective form... The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom.

Hegel *Philosophy of History*

To those more inclined to focus on ‘the state’ and the high claims Hegel made for the state, it may help to switch the attention to the principle which Hegel was concerned to affirm. Hegel is arguing for a principle of rational freedom, something which holds that the freedom of each and all is reciprocal, exists in mutuality, and is structured through a welter of intermediary associations composing the state. Human will and freedom needs to transcend particularism and achieve a genuine universalism by being embodied in an institutional arrangement that serves the universal interest. This, for Hegel, is ‘the state’. Not any state, and certainly not every state, but the state as an ethical agency. Hegel’s point has nothing to do with power worship but concerns the institutional framework required for the embodiment of freedom. Hegel argues that the individual can lead a ‘universal life’ only by being a member of the state, the state as the embodiment of individual freedom (PR para 258). There is no merit in the familiar liberal criticism that Hegel values the state over against the individual. On the contrary, for Hegel, individuals constitute the state in realising their universality. Hegel’s state counts as rational in being the universal end for the rational nature of individuals (PR para 258). ‘Abstractly considered, rationality in general consists in the interpenetrating unity of universality and individuality; in

content here concretely it consists in the unity of objective freedom and subjective freedom' (PR para 258R).

Hegel is to be credited for attempting to reconcile the interests of the individual and the community, seeking to embody a rational freedom in which the freedom of each individual is coexistent with the freedom of all individuals. What is 'universally recognised and valid' is available to all individuals (PR Preface 15). The individual 'has and enjoys his freedom' in the state 'on the condition of his recognizing, believing in, and willing that which is common to the whole' (PH 1956:43).

There is simply no basis to the familiar liberal criticism that Hegel put the universal interest of the state against the individual. Hegel is beyond the simplistic methodological individualism which lies behind the crude liberal dualism of individual and community/state. That is Hegel's achievement.

For Hegel, 'the essence of the modern state is that the universal be bound up with the complete freedom of its particular members and with private well-being' (PR 1942:280): 'its strength lies in the unity of its own universal end and aim with the particular interest of individuals' (PR 1942:161). The relation between the particular and the universal in Hegel's logic takes shape as the unity of the individual and the state through a whole range of intermediary bodies. The unity of each and all is a mediated relationship in which all individuals have a role. The family and civil society are crucial institutions since it is only as a member of such 'particular groups' that the individual enters into the state in an 'objective way' (PR paras 308R 158 166 182 207 209/229 242). Empty in abstraction from ethical life, the individual only acquires 'a content and a living actuality' when 'filled with particularity', attaining universality only in becoming 'a member of a corporation, a society etc' (PR para 308). The institutions comprising the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) are 'the pillars of public freedom since in them particular freedom is realised and rational'; they furnish the foundations of 'the citizens trust in .. and sentiment towards' the state (PR 1942:281 163).

I have spent some time on Hegel's doctrine of the state given the extent to which the caricature of Hegel in the hands of individualist liberal thinkers tends to prejudice interpretations of Hegel. I have written at length on Hegel's institutional embodiment of rational freedom elsewhere (Peter Critchley *Hegel and the*

Embodiment of Rational Freedom 2001). Suffice to say, my view is that Hegel enables the full and free realisation of the freedom of the individual in community with others. The liberal charge that Hegel neglects and even denies individual freedom is based upon no more than methodological individualist simplicity (and political prejudice).

I want now to return to objectification and alienation in Hegel's philosophy.

To recap. The organization of the world around us is the physical manifestation of human reason at work. From the simplest to the most complex, all human artefacts are 'objectifications' of human reason, coming to form one reasonable and rational system.

For Hegel, this process of objectification is also a process of alienation. Mind objectifies itself into innumerable different material products and various social and political institutions (the family, the occupational group, the state). Alienation is the result of the failure of mind to understand that these things are its products, its embodiments. Mind therefore treats its manifold objectification as things separate ('alien') from itself. Indeed, Hegel criticised empirical philosophy on this very point, that empiricism is the expression of mind's alienation from itself. Sense experience fails to see empirical things and institutions as the product of reason; the real empirical world is therefore not the true reality, only the alien external world present to the senses. It follows from this that the liberal repudiation of the state as capable of being the embodiment of freedom is a condition of alienation, the failure of individuals to recognise the power of institutions, ideas etc as their own powers in alien form. The task is to reappropriate those powers and reorganise them as self-conscious human power.

The interrelated concepts of objectification and alienation are central to Hegel's philosophy of history. For Hegel, human history is the process by which mind first alienates itself through objectification and then progressively comes to recognize these objectifications as its own products, finally understanding these objectifications as its own potential in objectified form, its own achievement.

Freedom is about mind coming to be at home in the world it has created. As Hegel expressed the view:

‘I am at home in the world when I know it, still more so when I have understood it.’

‘The ignorant man is unfree because he faces a world which is foreign to himself, a world within which he tosses to and fro aimlessly, to which he is related only externally, unable to unite the alien world to himself and to feel at home in it as much as in his home.’

Rather than invest this principle in a given place or institution, Hegel enjoins us to create this home by the use of reason. The ‘ignorant man’ is the man of common sense who mistakes the empirical world presented to the senses as the true world, who thinks sense experience yields adequate knowledge of the world. Such a man is unable to understand the world and is unable to be at home in the world. Such a man is unable to be. Chained to empirical necessity, the ignorant man is incapable of freedom. His common sense is, as Russell claimed, the metaphysics of barbarians. One can see how mistaken is the view that Hegel somehow worships the state as such, the current, empirical state. It all depends upon the extent to which the state actually is an ethical agency in embodying rational freedom and thus unifying universality and individuality. Any state that lacks this embodiment is not Hegel’s state.

Marx began his career as an Hegelian economics journalist who quickly became aware of the disparity between the ideal and the real.

‘A state which is not the realization of rational freedom is a bad state.’

Marx in Marx and Engels 1927, vol. I, i (i), p. 248

And neither is such a state Hegel’s state. Very early on in his journalism, Marx had seen how particular economic interests in the private realm were shaping public policy at the level of the state. This represents a violation of Hegel’s principle of the state.

To conclude, for Hegel, the goal, the culmination of history is the overcoming of alienation and the final triumph of reason. This consists in mind's total self-understanding and self-consciousness both of itself and thus (simultaneously) of the world.

35 MARX - LABOUR AS THE CREATIVE AGENCY OF SELF-GENESIS.

It was a small step from Hegel to the philosophy of Marx, the pair of them translating Kantian insights concerning creative human agency into the world of politics and society, conceiving the world as a self-made world. Objectification and alienation – the reappropriation of alienated human powers allowing us to find a home for ourselves in the world.

For Marx, *'The whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour, and the emergence of nature for man; he therefore has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation of his own origins.'*³ History is the process of human self creation as a result of developing - in the process of work - those potentialities which are given at birth. Human beings transform themselves through labour and become what they potentially are.

Marx criticised alienation as a determinism, a force of systemic necessity which conditions human freedom and possibility. Marx's point is that we can emerge from this condition of determinism and enlarge the realm of freedom by practically reappropriating the human powers alienated to institutional forms like the state and capital and organising these powers as social powers.

Marx repudiates the liberal conception, 'political emancipation', in conceiving of human emancipation in general.

All emancipation is reduction of the human world and of relationships to man himself.

Political emancipation is the reduction of man on the one hand to the member of civil society, the *egoistic, independent* individual, and on the other to the *citizen*, the moral person.

Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* as *social forces* so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed.

Marx EW OJQ 1975).

Revolutionary-critical praxis is the means to the end of this realised society of realised human beings.

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.

Marx repudiates the theoretico-elitist model which divides society into enlightened elite and ignorant mass. The transformation of the world is also a self-transformation, human beings changing themselves and their world through their praxis. Marx therefore has no need for Plato's philosopher-ruler enlightening the world of Being 'from the outside' (to quote a phrase later employed by Kautsky and Lenin, theorists and practitioners of the socialism of 'the party', what Weber called the dictatorship of the officials).

Marx's praxis is absolutely fundamental in resolving the paradox of emancipation, the view that since human beings are passively determined by corrupt circumstances, they are therefore too corrupted to change those circumstances without the aid of an elite who have somehow escaped that material determinism.

Marx affirmed that human beings are epistemologically and structurally equipped to see through and break through the relations which currently constrain their freedom. In consequence, we transform ourselves from unfree, determined, dependent, passive persons into aware, active, independent persons.

This is the philosophical ideal, seeking liberation from bondage, the overcoming of illusions by enlightenment and flourishing in an Aristotelian sense through the full use of our active capacities. And Marx locates this capacity for freedom in those subject to bondage, affirming their reality-changing and reality-creating praxis as giving them an alternative future.

It follows that any politics that Marx entertains must be conceived in terms of creative self-realisation and therefore embody an intimate, reflexive connection between means and ends.

It follows that ‘the Marxist aim of creating a democratic society superior to liberal ideals cannot be achieved through the leadership of an undemocratic party, something that Marx instinctively grasped when he agreed to join the conspiratorial League of the Just in 1847 on condition that it became an open and democratic organization.’ (Townshend 1996: ch 15).

I have written at length on Marx elsewhere. (Peter Critchley *Marx and Rational Freedom* 2001; *Beyond Modernity and Postmodernity* 6 vols 1997; *Reason, Freedom and Modernity: The Radical Transfiguration of the Greco-Germanic Concept of Rational Freedom* 2001). For Marx’s praxis as an ‘active materialism’ that transcends environmental determinism and fetish systems of politics and production, see Peter Critchley *Beyond Modernity and Postmodernity* vol 2 *Active Materialism: Marxism as Revolutionary-Critical Praxis* 1997; Peter Critchley *Reason, Freedom and Modernity* vol 5 *The Ontology of Reason: Active Materialism* 2001).

Rather than repeat myself, I’d refer those who want to read more concerning Marx’s centrality to the thesis developed here those books.

But in conclusion, in emphasising the need to avoid the pitfalls whereby a praxis philosophy ceases to be philosophy, concerned with truth and reason, and instead degenerates into a mere practice determined by the politics of the cave, my old Director of Studies Jules Townshend is worth quoting at length. Townshend asks how valuable it is to maintain a theoretical and practical fidelity with Marx? Surely philosophy matters more than politics.

Should not Marx be viewed as a major pioneer within the socialist tradition, rather than its prophet? Is it not better to follow the example, rather than the letter, of Marx? As a child of the Enlightenment he had an intense passion for freedom and knowledge in equal measure. He pursued knowledge in the name of freedom. This involved the destruction of any form of mystifying consciousness that sustained humanity's self-oppression, and the development of ideas that would be of practical use to the struggles of the oppressed and exploited. He would not have enjoyed the prospect of future generations looking to him not for inspiration, but for legitimation. Marx and the movement he created offer all those struggling for freedom and equality a treasure house of practical and theoretical wisdom - negative as well as positive. This movement is a constant reminder that the theory and practice of human freedom are always unfinished business. As long as capitalism remains in business, , Marxism as a movement and doctrine, in whatever form, is likely to remain obstinately relevant.

Townshend 1996 ch 15 conclusion

What Popper called 'Marx the maker', in contradistinction to 'Marx the prophet', is, in truth, Marx's reference to reality-creating and constituting human agency, the creative, reflexive praxis of individuals within their social relations. Regardless of the interminable debate as to what 'Marx really said', it is more important to recover Marx's stress on the creative praxis of the human agents themselves. One should not make excessive demands upon theory, but leave a creative space for a practice that both incorporates and in turn informs theory, with major role in this reflexive process being played by the participants themselves.

36 FOUCAULT AND ETHOS

Whilst the position set out in this book has similarities to Michel Foucault's attempt to return ethics to its origins as *ethos*, ultimately, it is quite distinct in affirming a conception of philosophical truth which runs counter to Foucault's own position. Foucault himself issued that challenge in 'What is Enlightenment?' - 'We must obviously give a more positive content to [our] philosophical ethos' ('What is Enlightenment?', in Rabinow (ed.) 1984: 45). At best, Foucault could be presented as offering a 'social vision' which embraces certain values that are 'non-normative', 'non-universalist', and 'non-foundationalist'. The coherence of such a project can, however, be doubted.

Foucault is concerned most of all with resistance in face of the knowledge/power nexus. Critical philosophy 'is precisely the challenging of all phenomena of domination at whatever level or under whatever form they present themselves' (Foucault 1987: 112-31, in Defert and Ewald (eds), 1994: 131[729]).

The problem, however, lies in working out at the level of practice the forms of social relations which work to minimize the effects of domination. There is a real weakness here in Foucault's position. Foucault lacks a philosophical anthropology and so, given the permanence of the power/knowledge nexus, can offer little more than a permanent resistance against a permanent domination. Conceiving social relations as relations of power through which individuals try to determine and effect the actions of others, the task is to work out ways of life which would 'allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination' (129[727]). And it is this task - the minimization of domination - which connects the fields of ethics and politics; it is their 'point of articulation' (ECS, 130[727]). For Foucault, *ethos* entails a practice of the self. The ethical task of formulating an *ethos*, a specific mode of self-relation which expands rather than inhibits the space of freedom assigns human beings the practical task of working out these forms of life, the 'rules of law [and] the techniques of management'.

Much depends on the extent to which one thinks that Foucault possesses a philosophical anthropology, needs one or can supply one. The idea that

Foucault's ethics is based upon the *telos* of freedom would seem to contradict Foucault's concern with resistance to power and domination. The view that freedom forms the *telos* of ethics implies that there is such a thing as a universal human nature after all, some inviolable human right, and that the aim of ethics is therefore to achieve an individual or collective freedom. Foucault in his later years would seem to have returned to Kant and the Enlightenment tradition in this respect. Taking its cue from the assertion that 'Men are born and remain free..' (Kramnick (ed.), 1995: 467) and the opening lines of Rousseau's *Social Contract* 'Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains', the French National Assembly promulgated 'The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen' in August 1789. Foucault's return to the subject in his later writings suggests that he came to embrace this idea of universal 'Man' - a creature endowed with inalienable rights and duties, even to return to a transcendental subject grounded in natural law, guaranteeing not only an epistemology but also a deontology. If so, there is some similarity between Foucault's *ethos* and the view of philosophy as *ethos* developed in this book.

The extent of this similarity is, however, questionable. For Foucault, freedom is not a universal constant of human nature but an historically conditioned possibility which emerges only in the context of specific power relations. Foucault's conception of freedom appears merely as a modern day variant of an amoral Hobbesian power struggle, in that it is utterly lacking in moral, ontological and anthropological implications with respect to power relations. Foucault does not criticise power relations on account of the fact that they contradict human nature and neither does Foucault justify any particular relations by virtue of the fact that they correspond to this human nature. Human freedom for Foucault is neither a point of origin nor of destiny towards which we strive but is merely a condition of our striving. Freedom for Foucault is not a substance but is as relational as the power/knowledge nexus. Foucault's *ethos* lacks grounding in ethics, anthropology and ontology. Foucault repudiates the notion of a transcendently grounded human nature and so has no conception of *ethos* as an ideal state which corresponds to and enhances the human ontology. Frankly, in his own terms, there seems to be no way in which Foucault can embody and express freedom in a life affirming sense. Freedom is merely the

concrete capacity of individuals to refuse, to say 'No'. This is fine and may well be liberatory at the level of resistance. The existentialist Albert Camus stated that 'he who says 'No' really says 'Yes' by affirming values beyond the boundaries'. But at some point, the 'No' of resistance to domination has to take permanent, practical form of the 'Yes' to a life beyond domination. One can doubt whether Foucault, on his own terms, lacking a philosophical anthropology, can say 'Yes' in this sense. Foucault's 'No' is valid as a refusal to be governed – or to governing oneself - in a certain way. This capacity to refuse keeps open a little space of freedom in a condition of domination, and makes possible a creative approach to ethics and politics. But to be against one state begs the question of an alternative state which is worthy of support. One can keep saying 'No' until nothing exists, but only at the price of a condition of permanent refusal which is ultimately impotent. Rajchman distinguishes Foucault's notion of freedom as practical and 'nominalist' from the conception of Hegel and Marx, for whom freedom is an 'ideal' state waiting to be realized. (Rajchman 1985: 92-3). This, frankly, is a caricature of Hegel and Marx in Foucault's favour. It is the oldest and most crass of accusations that Hegel and Marx transfer responsibility for human action to some anonymous historical process. Both Hegel and Marx emphasise the key role of creative human agency in realising the ideal. Immanent lines of development are frustratable and will, indeed, fail to be actualised if human beings fail to act (Meikle 1985). There is no 'waiting' on history in either Hegel or Marx. History is always human history.

History does *nothing*, it does *not* possess immense riches, it does *not* fight battles. It is *men*, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving - as if it were an individual person - *its* own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.

Marx, *The Holy Family* (1845), MECW, 4, p.93.

At least in Hegel and Marx there is a reality in which *ethos* is to be embedded. By way of contrast, Foucault's freedom savours a great deal of an immature student politics of permanent protest, an endless rehearsal and re-enactment of

defeat and an endless refusal of reality. Foucault lacks a notion of essential autonomy and so grounds his freedom in our 'unwillingness to comply'. This unwillingness is 'specific and unpredictable' and therefore could never be abstracted and embodied in *ethos* as a new form of life (Rajchman 1985: 93). There is no ideal state to be realised here. Rather, Foucaultian freedom is limited to endlessly responding to and modifying the forms of government and self-government that shape the way we live. (Falzon *Foucault and Social Dialogue*, 52-6; Coles 1991: 99-120.) An Hegelian or Marxist perspective, indeed a Judaeo-Christian perspective based upon a universal human nature, is capable of actually constituting those forms of life in the first place. Paradoxically, Foucault's definition of *ethos* seems incapable of actually constituting a way of life and is limited to merely refusing and resisting the ways of life formed by others. One can reject Foucault's position not for it being radical and emancipatory, but for it not being radical and emancipatory enough. Whatever else it is, Foucault's *ethos* isn't freedom in any positive, life affirming and enhancing sense. It is life on the margins, in the shadows, on the fringes of society. Foucault cannot ground his conception of freedom. My rejection of Foucault's position is not because it is liberatory, it is because it isn't liberatory enough.

When freedom is understood in terms of philosophical anthropology, then *ethos* emerges as both the condition of possibility and hence as the task of political and ethical practice.

Rajchman argues that Foucault's freedom lies 'in our capacity to find alternatives to the particular forms of discourse that define us'. (Rajchman 1985: 60.) Which begs the question of why we should choose one alternative over another? Without a philosophical anthropology, we have no criteria by which to choose, other than subjective preference. This also begs the question of whether any alternative conceived in this way could ever constitute a way of life. Freedom, for Foucault, is simply the effect of our capacity to challenge both power/knowledge and domination and is not an alternative to either. Freedom is not 'the end of domination', but a 'revolt within its practices'. (Rajchman 1985:115). We seem to be caught up within a pointless circularity, not so much a Trotskyite permanent revolution, which does eventually go somewhere, as a

permanent refusal and resistance which keeps us ensconced within a permanent domination. Whilst we can keep saying 'No', we are never able to say 'Yes'.

One is entitled to question the contribution which Foucault's philosophical ethos is capable of making to any revolution against power and domination. The Greek origins of the term sheds light on the character of Foucault's notion of *ethos*. Aristotle makes the point that *ethos*, as the Greek term for 'character', is closely related to the term for custom or habit. The difference (when transliterated) consists simply of a macron (ˉ) over the 'e'. (Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1103a14.). In this Aristotelian sense, then, moral character is the product of the cultivation of the right habits, the right personal customs or attitudes. Foucault also establishes a connection between ethics and a certain set of attitudes or habits. However, this ethic is not defined by a normatively grounded code of behaviour but by a more amorphous general attitude, outlook or approach. Foucault's *ethos* is not codifiable. Foucault does not want to embody freedom in the manner of Hegel and does not want to. Foucault does, however, formulate *ethos* in a coherent fashion, involving a 'critical attitude' towards the growing governmentalization of modern societies. Here, Foucault asks in Kantian fashion - 'What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?' (WE, 34). Foucault proceeds to answer that we must re-imagine and transform our present through the transformation of our selves, our modes of behaviour and our ways of thinking. (WE, 41).

This self-transformation possesses two moments. the analysis of our historically imposed limits, the 'critical ontology of ourselves' (WE, 50), and the imaginative, creative attempt to transcend those limits which we deem to be unnecessary, the 'historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond' (WE, 47).

Foucault considers that moral systems which presuppose a universal human nature, such as Christianity, humanism or Marxism, are no longer capable of providing an acceptable practice of freedom. Hence Foucault's interest in those groups who refuse existing moral systems, as prefiguring the way in which we are to practise our freedom in future.

Foucault was subjected to intense criticism for having repudiated the Christian, the Marxist and the humanist, or the liberal-individualist, notions of freedom, along with the notion of the human subject. The denial of autonomous human agency would seem to preclude the possibility of effective resistance against regimes of domination, let alone allow the positive assertion of power. Foucault's position seems to imply that since power is all-powerful, the subject is therefore powerless. In his later writing, Foucault seeks to ground his entire historico-philosophical project on an ethical commitment to 'autonomy', 'liberty' and 'freedom' (*What is Enlightenment?*) which his earlier position seemed to deny. It should be emphasised, against such criticism, that Foucault, far from presenting power as a force which incapacitates human actors, had always emphasised the capacity of the subject to resist and engage in autonomous action. The real question is how far Foucault can live up to these commitments without a transcendental or constitutive freedom grounded in a philosophical anthropology?

Foucault's later turn can only make sense on the basis of a conception of a *telos* of freedom as the condition of the possibility of ethical practice. Whereas Foucault had once sought to expose the dark, repressive side behind the liberatory Enlightenment ideals of reason, humanity, citizenship, rights and autonomy, he later came to advocate 'freedom' as the condition of possibility of ethical practice. In the process, Foucault sought to extricate himself from counter-Enlightenment reaction to some kind of rapprochement with Enlightenment ideals, what has been described as a 'remarkable turn'. Remarkable indeed. It would amount to accepting the Kantian position as outlined above.

According to Jurgen Habermas, in 1983 Foucault suggested that he, Habermas, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor and others should come together for a colloquium on Kant's 1784 article 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' (Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', reprinted in Schmidt (ed.), 1996.) It never happened. Foucault's turn to the Enlightenment was not followed by a return to the Enlightenment. Foucault's '*What is Enlightenment?*' disappointed Habermas for this reason (Habermas, 'Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present', in Hoy (ed.), *Foucault*, pp. 103-4.) In the end, Foucault seems to be making a counter-Enlightenment use of Kant's classic Enlightenment text.

Nevertheless, in situating his final conception of critique in this Enlightenment context, Foucault can be accepted as one of *les lumieres*, in the very ambivalent way that Jean-Jacques Rousseau also counts as a member of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's criticisms of Enlightenment rationalism were quite distinct from those of the reactionary counter-Enlightenment, and the same may be said of Foucault. Foucault seeks to rejuvenate the emancipatory *attitude*, the *ethos*, which was the driving force of Enlightenment, and in this sense counts as Socratic in the way that this book has defined Socratism. The position has affinities with aspects Kant's Socratism adumbrated earlier. The fact that Foucault exposed the repressive aspects of Enlightenment rationalism does not mean that reason as such equates with repression. In this sense, Foucault is demanding that reason lives up to its emancipatory ideals.

Foucault's position is controversial, conceiving Enlightenment, and modernity, as an 'attitude' defined by the task it set itself rather than as an historical period emerging within particular social conditions. (Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 'What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on "What Is Enlightenment?"', in Hoy (ed.), *Foucault*, p. 117.) This attitude can be 'reactivated', 'actualized' rather than imitated, so as to produce something new, something that was not contained in the original. (WE, 42). Habermas argues that Foucault admires Kant because he aimed an arrow at the heart of the present (Habermas, 'Taking Aim', in Hoy (ed.), *Foucault*, p. 105.), and it is this liberatory commitment that is striking in Foucault's turn to the Enlightenment. For Foucault, Kant's question What is Enlightenment is a baton that must forever be carried forward beyond the present and into the future. Foucault in this respect is in fundamental agreement with Habermas, for whom the Enlightenment is an 'unfinished project'. Kant thus initiated a trail of thought that has yet to be fully explored. That said, it is apparent that Foucault strays from the Enlightenment path in several important respects and is interested in exploring other avenues. Habermas is committed to the ideals of the public use of reason and to the pursuit of consensus, in straight line of descent from Kant's *communis sensus*. (I have developed my position on Habermas at length in Peter Critchley *Habermas and the Rational Utopia* 2001). Foucault's concerns are more with the valorization of individual autonomy. Foucault's repudiation of public life and shared ideals still leaves his notion of *ethos* ungrounded and airy.

The claim that Foucault is a *lumiere* rests firmly upon his commitment to defend and expand the individual against the collectivising and totalising claims of reason and community. When Foucault delineates those features of the Enlightenment ‘attitude’ he seeks to ‘reactivate’, the expansion of individual autonomy stands out clearly. Whilst Foucault argues that the *ethos* of the Enlightenment requires that we find ‘the contemporary limits of the necessary’, he has no sense that the individual freedom he seeks may be an historically specific product. Instead, he urges that we must reject all that is no longer necessary for us to constitute ourselves ‘as *autonomous* subjects’ (WE, 43). (QL, 95[688].) Foucault does not appreciate that historically transient social relations may well be rejecting the ideal of autonomy as no longer required in changed social circumstances. Foucault is innocent of such social and historical context in implying that individual subjects are capable of creating themselves *ex nihilo*, asserting the Enlightenment principle of ‘a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy’ (WE, 44). Foucault can only argue for autonomy in this sense on the basis of his notion of ‘attitude’, a ‘*limit-attitude*’ which enables the transgression of ‘whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints’ (WE, 45). Again, we return to the problem of grounding. I drew attention to the criticism that has been directed towards Hegel’s doctrine of the state. My point here is that Hegel has the merit of seriously addressing the problem of the embodiment of freedom. A position that avoids essential questions of institutional mediation can be described as radical and emancipatory in only the most superficial sense. Hegel addressed the hard questions of politics and philosophy. Without a philosophical anthropology, Foucault’s apparently liberatory project is airy, as arbitrary as the constraints he seeks to oppose. Foucault asserts that this ‘attitude’ gives ‘new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom’ (WE, 46). What is this ‘undefined work of freedom’? If it is ‘undefined’, how can we be sure that it is freedom? If we can be sure it is freedom, then surely some kind of definition is possible? A definition is certainly required. Foucault’s work has this habit of trailing off at the crucial points. All that is left here is ‘attitude’ as a ‘historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves, on ourselves as *free* beings’ (WE, 47). All that is clear and certain

here is that the critical task requires 'a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty' (WE 47.). This labour and this impatience for liberty gives Foucault his connection to *les lumieres*, and establishes the condition of the possibility of Foucault's *ethos* of freedom. But what comes after remains curiously vague and inchoate in Foucault's writings.

37 RATIONAL RESTRAINT

The reference to Hegel and the embodiment of freedom makes clear the extent to which morality has political implications.

Within a political framework, the function of moral law is to harmonize the freedom of each individual with the freedom of all others. Before proceeding to develop this with respect to Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant and Marx, it is worth discussing games theory and human decision making.

The midbrain is the seat of instinctual energies and explosive emotions, the forebrain is the seat of higher behaviour and inhibitions. The development of these inhibitions tempers the development of human inventiveness and curiosity so as to prevent self-destruction. In his Jekyll and Hyde tale, Robert Louis Stevenson explores the possibility of separating the two sides of the human psyche, the good and the evil. If human beings can be gods, they can also be monsters. And the point seems to be that in aiming at becoming gods, human beings lose their inhibitions and instead become monsters.

In everyday life, individuals still, by and large, inhibit the impulses to enable something like civilised life to continue. Under pressure of a false identification of liberty with licence, encouraged by consumer capitalism and electoral campaigns, individuals have increasingly abandoned the habits of restraint which served to ease the strain of living in common.

For the best part of a century, a long succession of thinkers, politicians and advertisers have urged individuals to throw off moral, psychic and communal restraint to act on impulse, to yield to desire, and abandon measure in self-

gratification. If human beings were wholly rational and wholly good, then this crude, naïve psychology would be benign, beneficent even. But Kant always emphasises the crooked timber of humanity - out of nothing so crooked can something entirely straight be made. This moral and institutional nihilism actually unleashes not natural goodness but the demonic in human nature. 'Humans can be both good and bad' argued Thomas Aquinas. The bad needs to be restrained by morals, codes and institutions, and the good promoted by the same means. Natural inclinations need to be checked, as the constraint of the categorical imperative makes clear. Morality is part of the system of rational restraint and inhibition, guiding human beings in acceptable behaviour and, as such, is an integral part of the conscious control of the creative powers that humanity commands. Morality, ingrained in habit and custom, makes it possible to practise the highest forms of human inventiveness and creativity. The moral law within, given formal statement in Kant's categorical imperative, is in this sense an inner check, the rational restraint on short term impulse and desire to ensure long term health and well being.

This rational restraint comes hard to individuals brought up to mistake licence for liberty, to conflate needs with wants and to seek pleasure rather than happiness. The economic system, and the political system which serves it, has operated as a regime of endless gratifications in which individuals get what they want with neither deprivation nor penalty. The whole notion of limits is overthrown. Hence the endless, purposeless, nihilistic nature of the modern hedonistic treadmill. Only something with limit can be filled and fulfilled. The individual is caught within a cycle of endless insatiable satisfaction. The quantification and commodification of life through the extension of the market economy has been accompanied by the systemic elimination of the natural limits and moral inhibitions that once set human action within boundaries of the right and the good. Civilisations fall from within rather than without, and part of this fall can be attributed to the decadence and self-indulgence born of success. The margin of freedom won by technique and organisation, rather than being used for a greater expansion of human creativity, comes to be dissipated in easy living. The reluctance with which any kind of regulation is met, alongside the rush towards deregulation, the identification of the latter with freedom, indicates a popular unwillingness and inability to exercise self-control which is potentially fatal at a time when substantial governmental and

legal intervention and action is required to confront the challenges of climate change and global warming. This is a public fashioned in the image of business and political elites, passive egoistic consumers rather than citizen-producers with an active and conscious orientation to the world they have created.

Politically and morally, such people, both leaders and followers, are unfitted for the conscious control of the sum total of human technics and power. It is akin to putting alcoholics in charge of a brewery. Individuals who have lack any sense of restraint and inhibition as anything other than an infringement upon freedom are incapable of restoring the necessary self-preservative principle within society.

Experience requires recognition of the legitimate place of rational restraint and inhibition in human development. Deferred gratification, abstention, renunciation, self-denial are as much an essential part of human flourishing and enjoyment as satisfaction, innovation, inventiveness.

The process of democracy, in both the political and the economic life of individuals, is crucial to human development, but requires a high degree of conscious moderation if it is to be true democracy. The word democracy comes from the ancient Greek meaning the rule of the people, *demos* and *kratien*. This comes with the corollary that the individuals composing the *demos* must be capable of ruling. An insight into what this means is given by Aristotle's definition of the 'essential function of a citizen' as being 'to rule and to be ruled in turn' (Politics Bk 3.iv). 'But surely men praise the ability to rule and to be ruled, and the virtue of a citizen of repute seems to be just this - to be able to rule and be ruled well' (Politics Bk 3). Good citizenship depends upon the contribution a person's 'virtue' makes to the stability and well-being of the constitution. Aristotle distinguishes the virtue of the good *citizen* from the invariable 'perfect' virtue of the good *man*. The point to grasp, however, is the notion of self-restraining and other regarding behaviour in the idea of the good citizen lying in the alternation of ruling and being ruled in turn, locating one's best interests within the interests of the community of others. This is the virtue that every citizen must master, as a condition of true democracy but also as the condition of society's survival. The good of the whole requires the voluntary acceptance of inhibition. This is rational restraint. Democracy will be achieved when the individuals composing the *demos*

are capable of exercising rational restraint and conscious control for the common good, seeing the realisation of individual in the health and well being of the whole.

The individualistic orientation of contemporary business and politics creates mentalities and inculcates habits which deliberately and systematically undermine public life and the common good. The modern market economy, consumer and casino capitalism, and electoral politics all employ the devices of publicity in order to subvert the restraints and inhibitions that keep wants and desires in check. The result is to morally and institutionally disarm individuals so as to render them susceptible to the allurements of the advertiser in business and politics. In both economics and politics, the notion of free individual choice is used to hoodwink and hook the masses, taking them further and further away from democracy as conscious self-rule, selling narcotics, stimulants, aphrodisiacs in the form of symbols and slogans which have the appearance of freedom and democracy but which render the individuals composing the demos stupefied and passive. C Wright Mills argued that all advertisement is political in that, beyond the material goods offered for sale, the advertiser is selling a system. The goal of the advertiser is to create consumers out of citizens, encourage them to seek the satisfaction of their ends, freedom and happiness, on the market, to endlessly want and habitually say 'Yes' to every suggestion. This is not a democracy but an idiocracy, *idiotes* meaning individuals interested only in their private affairs. The antonym of *idiotes* is *polites*, the origin of the word politics, referring to those interested in public affairs. This is politics conceived as creative self-realisation in a *politikon bios* or public life.

Under the pressure of advertisement as a system of mass manipulation, the breakdown of restraint and inhibition has proceeded to weaken and undermine public life in the name of (individual) freedom. Good government, public spiritedness and common purpose are crucial to civilised society but these are all being forced into retreat by the rejection of 'big government' and notions that morality is a private issue. The result exposes the lie of many radicals yearning for a lost paradise, a lost human nature corrupted by civilisation. By abandoning restraint and inhibition, we have moved even further away from the lost Eden.

Paradise will be regained only if human beings can learn to exercise rational self-control, regulate impulse and desire, and ascend the levels of sympathy, empathy, understanding and wisdom within the trust relations of an extended sociality. And this requires the building of institutions which ground the moral law, not their destruction. Rather than keep saying 'No' to public life, we need to find a public life which is worthy of our assent and to which we can say 'Yes'.

The renewal of rational restraint and inhibition within a common purpose on a global basis is now a condition for human survival. The environmental crisis is universal in nature and imposes the old ideal of universalism as a moral imperative upon all national governments. The human capacity for restraint and inhibition must be proportional to the power humankind now commands. Without this proportion between technical and moral power, it will be impossible to control the growing malignity in the world. Nuclear arms, weapons of mass destruction, etc are merely the physical material manifestations of an inner disorder. It was this that Picasso expressed in *Guernica*.

The names of the wars and the weapons employed in them get forgotten as they accumulate. It is the lack of proportion in the human soul that really matters. The aspect of human nature which tends to destruction has lost its mooring and is no longer emotionally anchored, with the result that technical and material accomplishment has been accompanied by the eruption of malign forces out of the unleashed unconscious. It is no surprise, then, that the height of human achievement in technics, the conquest of natural necessity and the creation of a margin of freedom, should have been accompanied by the heights of barbarism. In two world wars in just half a century, human beings came close to wiping out civilisation. In a physical sense, European civilisation *was* destroyed in large parts, reduced to rubble. The *idea* lived. But so too did the forces for destruction. This technically accomplished, highly disciplined and highly co-ordinated civilisation brought about a technically accomplished, highly disciplined and highly coordinated destruction, destroying cities and killing and maiming millions.

Freud exposed the death instinct – *thanatos* - that is stalking civilisation. With trillion dollar arms budgets, the forces of production have indeed become forces of

destruction, that very margin of freedom from necessity which Marx thought would be used for socialism being used to perpetuate a system of scarcity. Capitalism is a system of scarcity, not just material but emotional and psychological. It is not just, as Veblen argued, the institutional reproduction of scarcity to keep prices and profits up, keeping production below technologically feasible levels, but the mentalities of meanness and grasping which causes individuals time and again to fail to identify possibilities for freedom.

These mentalities need to change. The environmental crisis demands a change in political behaviour on the part of politicians, governments and parties. And this will come if people see themselves as citizens of a public life rather than as consumers in a market society. It all depends on whether individuals can ascend the levels of cognition and see the long term common good. This requires that long range strategical thinking replaces short term tactical thinking. The short term individual good is served on the market, freedom and happiness bought with the coin and sold by advertiser who promises to satisfy every want and desire. This is to exchange possibilities for a much richer freedom in the long term for a limited freedom in the immediate term.

If morality is not adequate, if everyday social practices are not informed by rational purposes, if human beings do not learn that restraint and inhibition serve long term health and well being for all, then the necessary political and institutional controls will always be lacking. Every political and institutional change will fall short of what is required if a fully awakened sensibility and personality is lacking.

‘Each of us must remember his humanness: it takes precedence over our race, our economic class, our politics, our religion, or our nationality. Only to the extent that the nations cultivate this humanness, becoming members one of another, can our civilisation achieve peace and security, to say nothing of the well-being and creativeness that will eventually issue forth from them. If we do not put humanity, in every sense of this word, before all petty and limited ends, nothing can be saved’ (Mumford 1944 ch 9).

If human life is to thrive on a high level, as distinct from merely existing as a diminished primitive horde, the response to the challenge of global ecological crisis must be decisive, intelligent and universal. It requires that each and every person makes an effort to rise above short term, egoistic impulse, desire and want to apprehend a greater and richer range of human potentialities in relation to others. ‘No habits must be uncriticised; no values must remain unexamined; no institutional procedures must be regarded as sacred; no life-denying goals must remain unchallenged. It is not this or that group, elected or self-elected, that must carry the burden of mankind's salvation. Every individual person must first mobilise himself to meet the danger, with a more unconditional acceptance of responsibilities and sacrifices than even the British did when they stood alone, facing imminent destruction, in the summer of 1940. Our best will hardly be enough to guarantee survival. Less than our best will be treason to humanity’ (Mumford 1944 ch 9).

An early appeal to a humanism that transcends politics and religion and nation came from Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein.

“There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom. Shall we, instead, choose death, because we cannot forget our quarrels? We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest.”

Bertrand Russell 1872-1970 *The Russell-Einstein Manifesto*

The prospect of universal nuclear destruction lay behind this appeal to common humanity. In the same manner, the environmental crisis is the occasion for emphasising what we have in common as human beings rather than what divides us. It rises above the institutionalised divisions of politics to affirm a deeper politics of ontology, of human *Being*. It is to locate the common good on common ground. The appeal to the humanity of human beings is an appeal to reason, reason with its ethical component.

The conception of homo sapiens, human beings as rational thinking beings, points to the existence of a rational human nature and implies that structures and institutions of cooperation, coordination and communication enhance human freedom and well being. What Hegel calls the progress of reason to the consciousness of freedom has been a long and hard road and there have been many false starts, retreats and collapses suffered along the way. But the world of ideas keeps pointing towards the summit. Developments in mathematics, evolutionary psychology and biology and computer science have been creating a paradigm-shift in our understanding of the requisites of long term health and well being (Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal*; Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, and Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption*).

Games theory emerged in 1944 as a new branch of mathematics, devised by John von Neumann (1903-1957). One of the greatest intellects of the twentieth century, von Neumann was involved in the development of thermonuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and the theory of nuclear deterrence. The son of a banker, von Neumann recalled conversations he had with his father concerning the problems in running a bank. For von Neumann, economic analysis did not take adequate account of the complexities of human decision-making. Choosing the best of several alternatives is simple when consequences can be calculated. Life, however, is not that simple. The outcome of choice depends on the reactions of others, and these reactions can neither be calculated nor predicted.

Games theory purports to show a mathematical representation of action under conditions of uncertainty. Its most famous application is the Prisoner's Dilemma. The dilemma involves the following scenario:

The police have arrested two men under suspicion of having committed a serious crime. There is, however, evidence only to secure a conviction for a lesser offence. The only chance of getting a conviction for the serious offence lies in getting at least one prisoner to inform on the other. The prisoners are held in separate rooms with no communication between them being possible. The suspects are then offered a deal. If one informs and the other stays silent, the informant will go free and the other will receive a jail sentence of ten years. If they both inform

on each other, they will both receive ten years, making a total of twenty years. If both prisoners remain silent, they will be convicted only of the lesser offence, and will each spend only a year in prison.

The dilemma concerns the nature of reasoning. Reasoning in isolation, without communication, each prisoner pursues a self-interested strategy. The optimal decision for the individual is to inform on the other and hence go free. But since the reasoning is symmetrical, i.e. each prisoner thinks the same way as the other, each informs on the other in expectation of going free with the result that both are sentenced to serve ten years each. If both had remained silent, they would have been imprisoned for one year each. Had they cooperated and communicated and hence reasoned together, they would have opted for this strategy. The most optimal outcome is one achieved by mutual reasoning. Without cooperation and communication and mutual agreement, neither one can be certain that the other will do the right thing. Each follows the self-interested course and produce an outcome that is least optimal for both.

Breaking the figures and reasoning down to essentials indicates clearly how self-interest brings about the least optimal outcome and how cooperation brings about the most optimal outcome. Long term strategic thinking trumps short term tactical thinking.

We can change the figures but keep the same scenario to elaborate the principle further.

Two prisoners kept apart given the deal

Both keep quiet $= 2 + 2$ years = 4 years in total

One splits on the other $= 0 + 6$ years = 6 years in total

Of course, the reasoning is symmetrical, both individuals think the same way. The best possible outcome for each as an individual is to split on the other and receive 0 years in prison. That's what the self-interested individual would choose. And in the Prisoner's Dilemma, the individual is 'free to choose', to use free market economist Milton Friedman's words. Self-interest leads each to split on the other – therefore:

Both split on each other = 6 + 6 years = 12 years in total

In terms of individual self-interest, the 0 years is the most optimal outcome, so each individual has an incentive to choose to split on the other. Since they both think and act in the same self-interested way, they both choose to split on each other, with the result that they each get 6 years, a total of 12 years. Had they kept quiet, each would have received 2 years, a total of 4 years. Self-interested reasoning thus generates the worst possible outcome. The moral is that we need to obey the general will by cooperating and communicating with each other in order to ensure the common good.

The Prisoner's Dilemma offers mathematical proof that self-interest does not necessarily generate optimal outcomes, neither for the community nor for the individual. On the contrary, self-interested reasoning inhibits rather than enhances individual freedom. The argument subverts the fundamental premise of Smithian economics. The idea that a number of individuals pursuing self-interest generate an outcome which is beneficial to all is turned on its head. What Marx had understood politically and philosophically was proved mathematically. To the contrary, individuals, acting rationally according to self-interest, produce an outcome which is the least optimal for all concerned.

Evolutionary biology has shed further light on the egoism-altruism relation. A long running tension in Darwinian biology has concerned the compatibility between the high value that all human societies placed on altruism and the notion of the survival of the fittest. In the struggle for survival, altruism should not thrive, let alone be held out for emulation. Clearly, the sacrifice of personal interest for the good of the group possesses some evolutionary advantage. This could go to extremes in the instance where the individual sacrifices his or her own life for the benefit of the group, losing the chance for his or her genes to flourish in future generations. Darwin was aware of the problem, arguing that the bravest individuals 'would on an average perish in larger number than other men'. The hero 'would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature'. Altruistic behaviour should not, in evolutionary terms, survive. Yet all thriving human societies value altruism. An

answer to Socrates' question may well be found here, Socrates giving his life on a point of moral principle of no immediate benefit to himself.

The Prisoner's Dilemma proposed the resolution of this supposed paradox, showing how self-interested choice and action did not always yield optimal outcomes and could generate the least optimal. The paradox derives from the artificial nature of the context in which the reasoning takes place. The reasoning parties involved lack contact and communication, a notion which lacks any social and historical basis. In real society, individuals meet repeatedly, communicate and negotiate and deliberate. Individuals reason in a social context in relation to other individuals. As social and rational animals, they eventually work out compacts, agreements and strategies which are mutually beneficial to each and all. In other words, they decide to co-operate within community: 'I will stay silent if you stay silent'. It is in each individual's interest to reach a common agreement. Each individual acts in the interest of the other individual because it is in her or his interest to do so. To a political philosopher, this sounds like reinventing the wheel. This argument is familiar to social contract theorists and historians of the origins of political society. The argument transcends self-interest rationality by first of all suggesting context and agreement and then going further to propose repeated contact in the same context, the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. The Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma goes beyond the single contact to propose that since individuals find themselves repeatedly in the same situation, they have a chance to learn. Political society as a learning mechanism which enables individuals to ascend the levels of cognition to the long range common good. This is the long terms strategic capacity which human beings need to evolve for survival in the view of James Lovelock.

If mathematics, economics and evolutionary biology were drawing conclusions which savoured a great deal of traditional political philosophy, so computer science has developed elaborate programmes to restate a traditional morality.

The political scientist Robert Axelrod announced an international competition to find the programme that won at playing the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma against itself and other opponents. (Axelrod 1990). The winning programme was called Tit-

for-Tat and was devised by Anatole Rapoport. The programme began by cooperating and proceeded by repeating the last move of its opponent. The principle followed was 'What you did to me, I will do to you'. Although the more aggressive programmes did well in the short run, they would always lose out on account of the retaliation that aggressive action provoked. Tit-for-Tat thus demonstrated the survival value of reciprocal altruism.

In the late 1980s, Martin Nowak developed a programme called 'Generous' which was capable of beating Tit-for-Tat. The weakness of Tit-for-Tat lay in the way it could be drawn into a destructive cycle of reprisal and counter-reprisal in face of a particularly nasty opponent. Again, the phrase of Gandhi springs to mind, 'an eye for an eye leaves us all blind'. In truth, the Biblical quote is an argument for proportionality, 'measure for measure', as in the Tit-for-Tat programme. Gandhi's meaning pertains to a destructive cycle which goes from bad to worse. The history books are full of examples of this destructive cycle of reprisal at work. Franco-German rivalry came close to destroying European civilisation. Tit-for-Tat is vulnerable to this weakness. 'Generous' avoids this cycle by randomly but periodically forgetting the last move of its opponent, effectively allowing the relationship to begin again. Should France in 1919 have forgotten the war indemnities Bismarck imposed in 1871? Should Germany in 1940 have forgotten the iniquities of the Versailles treaty of 1919? France and Germany began a new relationship in 1945 and European civilisation recovered, achieving a general prosperity for greater numbers than it had ever achieved.

Martin Nowak had produced a computer simulation of the human virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation which are central to all the world's religions. How to embody these in political society is the key question, a question which motivated the works of thinkers like Grotius, Leibniz, Kant and many others.

The implications of these computer programmes specifically and games theory generally are profound. It sheds a penetrating light upon the ages old clash between individualism and communitarianism, liberty and authority, negative and positive liberty, Anglo-American and Continental thought. It suggests that the whole debate is based on a misplaced antithesis between individual and society, suggesting that society is composed of individuals in reciprocal relation and that it is the reasoning in

that relation that counts. A whole political and moral tradition which asserts the rights and the liberties of the individual as such is not only misguided but literally misleading. Far from being protective of individual liberty, the liberal tradition systematically generates outcomes which diminish and inhibit individual freedom. Individual freedom generates a collective unfreedom, individual rationality brings about a collective irrationality. And that collective unfreedom and irrationality diminishes the liberty of each within the all. Whereas cooperation and communication enhances and enlarges human possibilities, individualism separates individuals from each other and closes down the common realm of solidary and emancipatory interaction. The argument offers proof that not only can a rational basis for politics and ethics be established, it can be established in a specific sense.

Karl Popper famously wrote a defence of individualist liberal thought and politics in terms of the 'open society'. He identified Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Marx as the 'totalitarian' enemies of this free and open society. His identification of liberty with the individual as such meant that he was unable to understand the way that these thinkers sought to reconcile the legitimate claims of individual and community so as to produce a general good that benefits each individual as well as all individuals. Against the whole tendency of individualist modern thought and practice, the insights generated by games theory suggest a rational basis for a communitarian ethic and politics. In a specific sense, both Tit-for-Tat and Generous demonstrate that individuals and communities as a whole thrive when organised around two fundamental principles, reciprocity and forgiveness, which may also be called justice and mercy.

Reciprocity and justice are principles which are central to the Continental tradition in political philosophy, deriving from Plato and Aristotle and finding expression in the works of the likes of Grotius, Pufendorf, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx and many others. For Plato, justice is the social virtue par excellence. (Peter Critchley *Plato: The Architect of Rational Freedom*; Peter Critchley *The Rational Freedom of Plato and Aristotle* 2001).

Forgiveness and mercy are central principles of the Judaeo-Christian faith, a faith which has sustained western civilisation for two thousand years. One can relate this faith to the tradition of political philosophy outlined above. Plato's ideal forms as the one true, heavenly, reality behind that apparent to the senses, Marx from a family of rabbis and Marxism as a Judaeo-Christian heresy. One of the strongest statements against an ethical and cultural relativism which is based upon the separate self has come from the Pope.

'Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own "ego".'

Pope Benedict XVI, June 2005

The self and sensuous desires separate individuals from one another, locking each into his or her own ego, thus turning liberty into a licence that becomes a prison for each and all. In this passage one can recognise Aristotle (the perils of individual liberty as a licence that constrains all), Kant and Rousseau (natural inclinations and desires chaining individuals to empirical necessity), Marx (the universal separation and antagonism of individuals within atomistic *bourgeois* society meaning that all become playthings of alien powers), Plato's cave, Weber's iron cage, Foucault's carceral society, Adorno's administered society. The ego is a prison. Individualism leads to the least optimal outcome for all individuals taken together. With the wealth of a philosophical and socio-theoretical tradition behind these views, the most interesting question is why it is left to the Pope to defend universal positions which affirm a common humanity above and beyond the immediacy of self and ego, desire and inclination? In his most recent book, Eric Hobsbawm has commented on the fact that in the last quarter of a century no leader of a left of centre political party in the western world has condemned capitalism as such, as opposed to this or that – supposedly remediable - feature of capitalism. Indeed, the only leader of any major institution to have done so, Hobsbawm points out, is the Pope. Leaving aside the

political reasons for this retreat of socialism, closer attention should be paid to the abandoning of the universal ethic of a common humanity on the part of the Left in favour of an identity politics.

The reference here to traditional ethical and political philosophy is interesting in light of what Bronowski writes of John von Neumann. 'John von Neumann was born in 1903, the son of a Jewish family in Hungary. If he had been born a hundred years earlier, we would never have heard of him. He would have been doing what his father and grandfather did, making rabbinical comments on dogma' (Bronowski 2011 ch 13).

The longevity of these principles is readily understood. They are not written into the historical process, although their embodiment can be described as a rational history; they are deeply rooted in biological reality. The philosophers and theologians, from Plato and Aristotle to the Stoics to Avicenna and Averroes up to Aquinas, Spinoza, and so on, were not, after all, wrong to build their arguments on the assumption of a rational human nature. Whether one looks at 'nature's plan' in Kant or the progressive unfolding of reason in Hegel, where once we could be suspicious of a 'windy metaphysics', it turns out that we can locate the ideal within the real as immanent potentiality and can confront the 'is' with an 'ought to be' since these are moral imperatives grounded in biological realities. There is a direct correlation between morality and politics, between social justice and social order. A society which embodies justice and practises forgiveness will endure whereas an unequal and vengeful one will not.

The building and the endurance of civilisation depends less on individual power and more on the habits of co-operation. Individuals working together stand a better chance of achieving their goals if they can co-ordinate their efforts than they do if they work apart. Aristotle argued that reason was the feature which distinguished human beings from other animals. He has been accused of overrating the rational faculty of humans and underestimating the capacity of non-human animals to solve problems. But the name *homo sapiens* means 'rational man'. The latest work in biology confirms that Aristotle was on the right lines. The distinctive feature of human beings is the 300 per cent increase in brain size since the species split from the

other primates. The development of the use of language, culture, religion, art, technics etc. all followed. This distinctive feature derived from the advantages of extended sociality. Biologists even propose a close correlation amongst mammals between brain size and social group: the bigger brain is associated with the larger social group. One finds here a biological basis for the political principles of reciprocity and justice. And there is also a biological basis for scale in that this measure suggests that the human group has an optimum size. On average, the maximum number of people that any individual can know well and count as friends is 150. Community has its roots in a biological reality. The philosophical convention that one cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is' breaks down against these constants.

Although self-interest has been sanctified as individual liberty and made the basis of modern electoral politics and free market economics, the figure of the self-interested, self-maximising individual is subverted by the Prisoner's Dilemma. This dilemma demonstrated the extent to which self-interested action and reasoning produces less than optimal outcomes. The dilemma is resolved only when the game is played repeatedly by the same participants who, over the course of time, learn the value of co-operation. This co-operation is predicated on trust, each individual believing that the others will reciprocate at some point the actions which that individual takes will benefit the other individual.

This trust is the product of cooperative behaviour and is built up over time so as to create added value, a resource that is bigger than the individual parts. The simplistic slogan 'there is no such as society' is exposed in all its crudity; it merely refers to the beginning of the game, before individuals have communicated, cooperated and learned. This trust as added value may be called *social capital*.

Social capital is generated through repeated interactions between the same individuals, the so-called Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. Long term relationships build trust between participants and foster habits of co-operation. Scale and close connection are important. For Aristotle, the true city is one that can be taken in one view. At this scale, each member should know all others. Beyond this scale, human relations become impersonal and anonymous. They cease to be cities in Aristotle's

sense. Acts of robbery and violence increase in frequency with size. An individual is more likely to take advantage of others whom he or she is not likely to see again.

40 TRANSACTIONAL ENCOUNTERS

In *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, George Soros writes of the 'Open Society Endangered'. Whereas successful business depends on the patient building of relationships, relations have now become 'transactional', a series of one-off encounters. The results should be predictable if one understands the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. One-off encounters lead to least optimal outcomes. In the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, it is repeated encounters that build trust and foster the cooperation that leads to the most optimal outcome. One-off transactional encounters predictably bring about the destabilisation of the social order.

In a perfectly changeable, transactional society the individual is paramount. From the point of view of the individual it is not necessary to be morally upright to be successful; indeed it can be a hindrance ... In a society where stable relationships prevail, this is much less of a problem because it is difficult to be successful if you violate the prevailing social norms. But when you can move around freely, social norms become less binding, and when expediency becomes established as the social norm, society becomes unstable.

Soros p80.

At this point the argument revisits certain fundamental notions of political philosophy, Plato's notion of justice as a social virtue, Aristotle's *zoon politikon* requiring a *politikon bion* to achieve happiness. Plato set the size of population of the ideal city at 5,000. Aristotle argued that it was the quality of relationships within that matter more than quantity of persons, insisting on appropriate scale so that the city should be taken in one view with each member knowing all others.

It is scale that is all important. Hegel valued the thick welter of intermediary associations that connected the individual to the state. Hegel's state as the universal interest, the 'march of God on earth', is not the abstract and mystical conception

critics allege. It is the realisation of the moral community that embodies the freedom of each and all. If the state does not realise rational freedom, then it is not Hegel's state as ethical agency.

Families, neighbourhoods, communities and so on are the intermediary associations which form the content of the association civic public. The universal interest of the state or political system is firmly grounded in a social ecology in which the smaller associations have a vital role to play within the whole. As Aristotle argued, the state or political community is the community of all communities, each accorded their appropriate place. There is nothing mystical or mysterious about this notion. Philosophers in the Anglo-American individualist liberal tradition see a problem that is entirely of their own making. In holding individual and community apart as antagonistic poles, any notion of common good or general interest is bound to appear oppressive of individual liberty, certainly when given institutional form in the state.

Jacob Bronowski recalls a conversation he had with von Neumann about his *Theory of Games*. 'You mean, the theory of games like chess.' 'No, no,' he said. 'Chess is not a game. Chess is a well-defined form of computation. You may not be able to work out the answers, but in theory there must be a solution, a right procedure in any position. Now real games', he said, 'are not like that at all. Real life is not like that. Real life consists of bluffing, of little tactics of deception, of asking yourself what is the other man going to think I mean to do. And that is what games are about in my theory.'

And that is what Games Theory is about. John von Neumann realised that whilst computers would be technically important, real-life situations are different from computer situations in that they do not have the precise solutions that chess or engineering calculations do.

The achievement of John von Neumann is to have made the distinction between short-term tactical thinking and grand, long-term strategical thinking. Whilst tactics can be calculated exactly, strategies cannot. John von Neumann's mathematical and conceptual success was to have demonstrated that nevertheless there are ways to form best strategies.

‘And in his last years he wrote a beautiful book called *The Computer and the Brain*, the Silliman Lectures that he should have given, but was too ill to give, in 1956. In them he looks at the brain as having a language in which the activities of the different parts of the brain have somehow to be interlocked and made to match so that we devise a plan, a procedure, as a grand overall way of life - what in the humanities we would call a system of values’. (Bronowski 2011 ch 13).

‘When I worked with him during the war, we once faced a problem together, and he said to me at once, ‘Oh no, no, you are not seeing it. Your kind of visualising mind is not right for seeing this. Think of it abstractly. What is happening on this photograph of an explosion is that the first differential coefficient vanishes identically, and that is why what becomes visible is the trace of the second differential coefficient.’

An abstracting mind sees the invisible, the true reality hidden behind the sensual world. But Bronowski draws attention to the danger of the intellect becoming elitist, leaving the mere mortals of common sense behind. In the end, this damages the intellect by rendering it narrow, one-sided, insular and self-absorbed. Those working at the level of theoretical reason need to respect and proceed from what Kant referred to as the ‘common moral reason’ of all as human beings.

‘He never finished the great work that has been very difficult to carry on since his death. And he did not, really because he gave up asking himself how other *people* see things. He became more and more engaged in work for private firms, for industry, for government. They were enterprises which brought him to the centre of power, but which did not advance either his knowledge or his intimacy with people - who to this day have not yet got the message of what he was trying to do about the human mathematics of life and mind.

Johnny von Neumann was in love with the aristocracy of intellect. And that is a belief which can only destroy the civilisation that we know. If we are anything, we must be a democracy of the intellect. We must not perish by the distance between people and government, between people and power, by which Babylon and Egypt and Rome failed. And that distance can only be conflated, can only be closed, if knowledge sits in the homes and heads of people with no ambition to control others, and not up in the isolated seats of power.

That seems a hard lesson. After all, this is a world run by specialists: is not that what we mean by a scientific society? No, it is not. A scientific society is one in which specialists can indeed do the things like making the electric light work. But it is you, it is I, who have to know how nature works, and how (for example) electricity is one of her expressions in the light and in my brain.' (Bronowski 2011 ch 13).

Plato's *Republic* defines an hierarchical organic functionalism which, in putting everyone in the place to which their skills and attributes fit them, puts the specialists above all. For the common good, mind, rather than their sectional interest. But who guards the guardians? Plato's philosopher ruler is a cheat, an aristocracy of intellect that fails for all the reasons adumbrated by Bronowski.

Knowing one's place and minding one's business is all very well if we are all equally valued for the contribution we make to the flourishing of the whole. Organic functionalism becomes altogether more unpleasant if its hierarchies are elitist, putting some above others. A distinction between vertical hierarchies and horizontal hierarchies is apposite here, valuing the contributions that each makes in their talent, skill and role, whilst avoiding valuing some over others.

The insights into grand, long term strategic thinking have yet to be embedded in social practices and relations and institutions. James Lovelock has argued that the human species needs to develop some such strategic capacity for reasons of its own survival. John von Neumann's insights go much further than survival, however, and pertain to the search for the foundations for the forms of human flourishing and fulfilment. It is too simple to argue that 'human nature' means that short term egoistic reasoning will always trump long term thinking for the common good, that competition always prevails over cooperation. The evidence against such a notion is there in the everyday world. It is as decisions and choices and actions become more abstract, and less well coordinated by relations and institutions, that the social instinct diminishes. This is the space for culture and morality. Human actions are mediated by values. Moral systems like the Kantian categorical imperative can be conceived as general strategies which cultivate the virtues and encourage individuals to restrain impulses and balance competing claims. This would appear to be what John von Neumann envisaged in *The Computer and the Brain*, where he sought a plan, a procedure, a grand overall way of life which could integrate the

various cognitive faculties of the brain and enable human flourishing with respect to all the human capacities. ‘This is what we would call a system of values’ writes Bronowski (Bronowski 2011 ch 13). Indeed, yes. Something like Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit*, the system of the ethical life. Or Kant’s categorical imperative. There is a sense in which mathematics and games theory have set about proving what thinkers in the rational tradition have known since Plato – that human beings realise themselves fully as human beings when the rational element of human nature controls the instinctive element (Plato Bk iv 1987:149/55).

Plato’s argument proceeds from the tripartite division of the elements of each soul:

- 1) reason – the faculty that calculates and decides;
- 2) desire or appetite – instinctive craving;
- 3) ambition, indignation, pugnacity.

Individuals are easily manipulated and managed at the level of desire and appetite and are too prone to identify their liberty at this level of immediacy. The result is that human beings limit their liberty well within its full potential. Plato’s argument points to the need for an ethico-institutional framework that enables human beings to access their rational faculty, thereby developing a greater capacity for reflective action, conscious determination and moral choice. This enables individuals to attain a richer freedom by realising the full range of human capacities, well beyond desire and appetite.

Human beings do not govern their lives by any computer scheme of problem solving. The problems of human life are not predictable and evade tactical reasoning. Human beings are not computers and hence the tactical reasoning appropriate to computers is inappropriate. Strategic reasoning is quite different in that it accommodates human behaviour and is open to moral principles. Human conduct is shaped in accordance with principles and human action is guided by these principles. It should not be beyond human possibility to finally devise that system of values which embeds long range, long term strategic thinking capacity for the common good. This is, after all, what successive human civilisations have been pointing towards since the code of Hammurabi in ancient Mesopotamia, since the concept of Maat in ancient Egypt.

Since ancient times, human societies have devised systems of ethical life as strategies incorporating values. These systems are designed to weigh the things that appeal to some in the short term against the ultimate, long-term satisfactions of greater numbers, ultimately of all.

Bronowski concludes *The Ascent of Man* on an optimistic note, claiming that 'we are really here on a wonderful threshold of knowledge'. 'And what is ahead for us? At last the bringing together of all that we have learned, in physics and in biology, towards an understanding of where we have come: what man is'. (Bronowski 2011 ch 13). All that we have learned is much more than physics and biology, much more even than the whole of science. For there are very good reasons for arguing that the system of values sought by John von Neumann in order to embed the conclusions he drew from games theory are integral to the 'rational' tradition in philosophy. Stated in its simplest sense, the moral of games theory is that whereas self-interested reasoning on the part of individual agents generates the worst possible outcome for each and all, communicative and cooperative focused on the common good brings about the most optimal outcome for each and all. The crucial problem of moral and political philosophy is how to embed strategic reasoning capacity in communicative and cooperative social structures, relations and institutions so as to enhance and enlarge the freedom and well-being of each individual together with all individuals.

That ethic, for me, defines the tradition of 'rational freedom' in philosophy. Resolving relations between the particular and the whole, the individual and the social, the short and the long term, self-interest and the common good is the central dynamic within the 'rational' tradition in philosophy, dating back to Plato and Aristotle. This book has been written firmly within this tradition of 'rational freedom', taking the ethical development of human personality as the central theme. This tradition is based on a philosophical anthropology which is characterised by a normative concern with the most appropriate mode of life for human beings. "The noblest of all studies is the study of what man should be and what he should pursue" (Plato, *Gorgias*, 487). Such a conception involves an anthropological analysis of the relationship between 'personality' and life orders, displaying a qualitative interest in the history of humankind.

Take Rousseau's definition of the fundamental problem of politics:

The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.

Rousseau 1973: 175

Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.

Rousseau SC 1973: 176/7

Rousseau proceeds to draw out the implications of this cooperation between individuals in constituting a public life that enhances the freedom of each and all.

At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a corporate and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains voters, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life, and its will. This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of *city* and now takes that of *Republic* or *body politic*; it is called by its members *State* when passive, *Sovereign* when active, and *Power* when compared with others like itself....

Rousseau SC 1973: 177

Rousseau argued for equality in terms that no one should be so rich as to be able to buy another and no one should be so poor as have to sell themselves.

Compare Rousseau's concern to balance the freedom of each individual with the freedom of all others to what Kant writes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here, Kant offers the Idea of a republican constitution, which allows '*the greatest possible human*

freedom in accordance with laws by which *the freedom of each is made to be consistent with that of all others'* (A316/B373, tr.).

This is the perfectly just constitution in which the greatest possible freedom enables the development of human capacities. Such a civic constitution establishes a commonwealth. Thus, Kant reasons, the ultimate purpose of Nature is to lead humankind from the state of individual rivalry to the state of universal harmony.

There is no distance at all from the assertion of rational unity of each and all at the level of moral principle to Marx's conception of the communist society as 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all' (Marx MCP Rev 1848 1973:88).

The general point is that no one person is free unless all are free.

The rational tradition in philosophy is best seen in the contemporary world by Jurgen Habermas. Looking to realise the freedom of each and all within community (Habermas 1992:146), Habermas presents a 'rational' ideal which anticipates and justifies a post-capitalist 'good' society characterised by the greatest possible happiness, peace, and community for all.

'The pursuit of happiness' might one day mean something different - for example, not accumulating material objects of which one disposes privately, but bringing about social relations in which mutuality predominates and satisfaction does not mean triumph of one over the repressed needs of the other.

CES 1979:199

The 'rational society' is thus defined in terms of the satisfaction of the human needs of all rather than the subjection of all to the deprecations of arbitrary power. Habermas defines this 'rational' concept concisely. Freedom, even personal freedom, is conceivable only in 'internal connection with a network of interpersonal relationships', in the context of the communicative and cooperative structures of a community, so that 'the freedom of some is not achieved at the cost of the freedom of

others'. There is a need, then, to establish 'the conditions of collective freedom' so as to remove the 'potential for Social-Darwinist menace' inherent in individualist conceptions of freedom. Habermas concludes that 'the individual cannot be free unless all are free, and all cannot be free unless all are free in community. It is this last proposition which one misses in the empiricist and individualist traditions' (Habermas 1992:146).

This is a call for grand strategic reasoning which focuses on the long range common good as against short range tactical thinking proceeding from individual self-interest. From Plato and Aristotle to Kant, Hegel and Marx, this conception holds that freedom is achieved through the unity of individuals as against their separation. As Clark summarised Aristotle's philosophy: 'Man's being lies in community, in the unity of man with man' (Clark 1975:107/8). It is in this sense that Marx the revolutionary emerges also as a traditionalist, as concerned with the common good as much as the Schoolmen of the Catholic Church. For Marx political rights are 'rights which are only exercised in community with others. What constitutes their content is participation in the community, in the political community or state. They come under the category of political freedom, of civic rights' (OJQ 1975:227). Marx is here affirming the old public life of the ancient polis. The 'so-called rights of man' are the rights of 'egoistic man, of man separated from other men and from the community' (OJQ 1975:229), 'the expression of the separation of man from his community, from himself and from other men' (OJQ 1975:221). Time and again, Marx calls for the unity of individuals within community as against the separation of each from the other and all from community. Individual liberty is 'not based on the association of man with man but rather on the separation of man from man'. It is 'the right of the restricted individual, restricted to himself (OJQ 1975:229), the 'right to private property' as the 'right to enjoy and dispose of one's resources as one wills, without regard for other men and independently of society: the right of self-interest' (OJQ 1975:229/30). This is an egoistic reasoning which puts human society on the lowest rung of games theory, selfish, uncooperative, uncommunicative individuals who choose the worst of all possible worlds.

The reference to Marx as a traditionalist and as a Schoolman was not meant in jest. Referring to the sin of usury, RH Tawney writes:

The medieval theorist condemned as a sin precisely that effort to achieve a continuous and unlimited increase in material wealth which modern societies applaud as meritorious, and the vices for which he reserved his most merciless denunciations were the more refined and subtle of the economic virtues. 'He who has enough to satisfy his wants,' wrote a Schoolman of the fourteenth century, 'and nevertheless ceaselessly labours to acquire riches, either in order to obtain a higher social position, or that subsequently he may have enough to live without labour, or that his sons may become men of wealth and importance - all such are incited by a damnable avarice, sensuality, or pride.' Two and a half centuries later, in the midst of a revolution in the economic and spiritual environment, Luther, in even more unmeasured language, was to say the same. The essence of the argument was that payment may properly be demanded by the craftsmen who make the goods, or by the merchants who transport them, for both labour in their vocation and serve the common need. The unpardonable sin is that of the speculator or the middleman, who snatches private gain by the exploitation of public necessities. The true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labour theory of value. The last of the Schoolmen was Karl Marx.

Tawney 1987 ch 1

That freedom is not the discovery of the modern world but originates in ancient Greece, continuing within a corporate matrix throughout the Middle Ages, is something which tends to be overlooked (Patterson 1991:ix/xvi chs 3 4). Further, the modern location of freedom in a private realm dominated by private property departs markedly from the pre-modern concern with the construction of a civic order (Wheeler 1971:75/6 80/2 82/4; Arendt 1973:217 218 221/2), from the conception of politics as pertaining to determining the appropriate means to the end of the common good of the community or state (Bigongiari on Aquinas 1975:x/xi xii xv xxiv xxvi).

Thomas More belonged to both Platonist and Catholic traditions. More than three hundred years before Marx, More castigated the emerging capitalism in the most vociferous terms. More makes the case for egalitarianism in the strongest terms:

when I compare Utopia with a great many a capitalist countries which are always making new regulations, but could never be called well-regulated, where dozens of laws are passed every day, and yet there are still not enough to ensure that one can either earn, or keep, or safely identify one's so-called private property when I consider all this, I feel much more sympathy with Plato, and much less surprise at his refusal to legislate for a city that rejected egalitarian principles.

It was evidently quite obvious to a powerful intellect like his that the one essential condition for a healthy society was equal distribution of goods - which I suspect is impossible under capitalism. For, when everyone's entitled to get as much for himself as he can, all available property, however much there is of it, is bound to fall into the hands of a small minority, which means that everyone else is poor.

And wealth will tend to vary in inverse proportion to merit. The rich will be greedy, unscrupulous, and totally useless characters, while the poor will be simple, unassuming people whose daily work is far more profitable to the community than it is to them.

Thomas More *Utopia* p66

Marx took his cue from Hegel and his concept of objectification and critique of alienation. 'I am at home in the world when I know it, still more when I have understood it', wrote Hegel. For Hegel, the objectification of our powers is also an alienation, so that human beings create a world that is alien to them. We need to take moral responsibility for our powers. This is of a piece with Hegel's central motif of the progress of reason to the consciousness of freedom. In this progress of mind, human beings come to understand the world as their own product. Hegel looked to reason, Marx looked to labour as the demiurge.

Only when man has recognised and organised his *forces propres* (own powers) as social forces so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of political force, only then will human emancipation be complete.

Marx OJQ EW 1975: 234

‘Political force’ here is the situation that the prisoners in Plato’s cave find themselves in. The state as a coercive instrument is Plato’s cave, the politicians are the puppeteers. The big difference is that whereas the world of Being for Plato lay in the world of the sun outside the cave, for Marx (and Hegel) human beings need to appreciate the alienated world as their own creation; they are the creators of the cave, in alienating their labour and their sovereignty to the puppeteers – and behind the politicians to the puppet masters. Sovereignty and labour are social powers which have been alienated to create the state and capital. Freedom for Marx entails the practical reappropriation of these alienated social powers and their reorganisation as social powers. This investment of the everyday lifeworld with governing power is the biggest society of all and amounts to the realisation of sovereignty and labour.

41 NIETZSCHE, POWER AND GOD

This idea of power brings us back to the notion of men becoming gods. Power is knowledge and knowledge is power. What happens when men aspire to the power and knowledge of gods? The line which got the most positive reaction when I sat my *viva voce* came when I argued that ‘it is not power that corrupts, absolute or otherwise, but lack of power’. I was defending Marx’s call for the practical restitution of power to the social body of associated individuals. But there are many classical examples. ‘Only power arrests power’ (Polybius).

But power can be as destructive and as dangerous a force as it can be a creative, life-affirming force. What kind of power? Technical power? Moral power? Can the two ever be complementary? Nietzsche argued that human beings should only have such power that they can creatively live up to. If power is not used creatively, then it would be used destructively. This is why Nietzsche considered the death of God to be a tragedy. Human beings were now charged with the responsibility to live as gods. Nietzsche suspected that they might well not be up to the burden. In this, Nietzsche’s pessimism has proven all too true, especially in the way in which means of production have been turned into means of destruction.

The governments of the world spent nearly \$1.5 trillion dollars on ‘defence’ in 2008 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2009: chap. 5.) Back in

1800, William Blake cursed the emerging machine civilisation as a 'rational madness'. Blake thought industrialism was the work of Satan. 'Oh Satan, my youngest born . . . thy work is Eternal Death with Mills and Ovens and Cauldrons.' The figures on arms expenditure defy reason and, indeed, are so far beyond comprehension as to evade criticism. Human beings cannot handle large numbers and are therefore blind to the madness. Past the first \$1 million or so, the mind is numbed into submission. Criticism seems pointless unless it goes deeply into the processes which have turned forces of production into forces of destruction. But to give some indication of how great these numbers are, John Lanchester reasoned thus: counting at a rate of one dollar per second, it would take twelve days to count a million dollars, thirty-one years to count a billion dollars, and six times all recorded history for a trillion dollars.

Including all defence spending in the public sector, the U.S. government alone spends more than \$1 trillion on the military. (Turse 2008). Military hardware, like all positional goods, is only of any value in relation to others. Thus US defence spending, mad as it is, is part of a general trend around the world. Military budgets continue their upward climb in Europe, China, India. (Sharp 2009). To put this into some kind of context, to make serious inroads into dealing with climate change has been calculated to require some 2% or more of GDP. Yet the governments of the world argue, hesitate, play for time, compete commitments downwards. There is much more enthusiasm, and money, in death than there is in life. Stable, sustainable, even development on the planet of some 7 billion people requires that swords be beaten into ploughshares so as to boost investment in education, training, health care and investment in sustainable energy and agriculture, yet governments are spending record sums on defence. The irony is that not only does this increase global insecurity by militarizing global relations and fostering a climate of fear, it leaves humanity wholly unprotected against nature's revenge for ecological despoliation.

The shadow of death which hung over the twentieth century shows no signs of going away, not least because the various oppositional forces in politics have been beaten, have lost their bearings and their confidence, and have retreated or withdrawn. The twentieth century was a charnel house. The madness evades reason. Not even the combined forces of Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Rotblat, Gandhi and assorted others was sufficient to get the point over. Michael Foot described himself as an 'inveterate peacemonger' and was denigrated for that

reason. Apparently, according to the conventional political wisdom, the CNDers were proven wrong. In what way? The Soviet Union fell. As though winning the Cold War was the point. Sakharov was exactly right. It took a physicist to penetrate the murk and bias of the politics of the cave. The USA and the Soviet Union pretended to fight a Cold War against each other whereas in truth they were fighting their own citizens, keeping them in their place. Thomas Jefferson warns of 'manacled people by their own consent'. Beguiled by the shadows on the wall, citizens soon become prisoners.

The madness was and is beyond words. It took an artist to paint the picture of the twentieth century – Picasso's *Charnel House*.



The Charnel House 1945 Picasso

(I had the privilege of viewing this painting at the Tate in Liverpool as I wrote and delivered parts of this work).

Well over 100 million human beings were killed in the twentieth century, and there is no sign that the killing is going to stop in the twenty first century. The modern world is characterised by rationalised, routinised death and destruction. Gil Elliot argues that the scale of man-made death is the central moral as well as material fact of our time. (Elliot

1972: 6.) And a psychological fact, too. Freud wrote of the tendency of *thanatos* to overpower *eros*. The figure of *thanatos* runs through the modern world as its central motif. In taking over Hegel's concepts of objectification and alienation, Marx wrote well on the extent to which the human creators come to be reduced to mere appendages of their creations. Money *talks*, and in talking, money acquires the qualities of a human being. The more objects come to be invested with existential significance, the less human beings are. Capital is the power of labour in alien form. Marx called capital 'dead labour'. Alienation is the creative power of human agency in dead form. Through alienated social relations, human beings have created a veritable world of the dead which has come to dwarf the world of the living in size and significance.

From another perspective, however, the challenge facing us remains the same as it ever was – to reclaim the alienated world as our own social product. What has changed in the twentieth century is quantity rather than quality, the scale of alienation soaring beyond all comprehension. Human beings need to reclaim their powers from the dead world. This is to face the same choice that Rosa Luxemburg put at the beginning of the twentieth century – socialism or barbarism. It helped no-one that Stalin turned socialism into barbarism. No wonder that the word progress now rings hollow. Robert Heilbroner, in *The Human Prospect*, and Christopher Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, both pointed to trends and transformations in contemporary society which pointed to a bleak future for human beings in the long term. For Robert Nisbet, 'disbelief, doubt, disillusionment and despair have taken over, — or so it would seem from our literature, art, philosophy, theology, even our scholarship and science.' (Nisbet 1980: 318.)

The problem with such pessimistic assessments is that they can become self-fulfilling prophecies which sap the strength. It is doubtful that if there has ever been a time without dark forebodings with respect to the future. Blake is a good example to follow.

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the countenance divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold
Bring me my arrows of desire
Bring me my spear : O clouds, unfold
Bring me my chariot of fire !

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

"Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets"
NUMBERS ii. 29.

In England's 'green and pleasant' land, and everyone else's too. Building Jerusalem requires a mental fight and an active sword. But remember, Jerusalem means 'city of peace'. It is also worth pointing out that Blake is saying that we need to build Jerusalem, meaning that it doesn't already exist. One gets the impression that many of those singing the hymn are thinking of an England that already exists in some long lost past. Jerusalem has still to be built, and Blake making an appeal to us to become builders in the common work of building Jerusalem.

Nietzsche's philosophy entailed ceaseless opposition and resistance to the iron cage of state-managed rationality and systemic economic compulsion. Empowerment takes the form of human embodiment, reciprocity and solidary exchange in the concreteness of the everyday habitus of the life world. The reference to the 'iron cage' is a reference to Max Weber's view of modernity as a steel hard cage embracing subjectivities of each and all.

42 WEBER THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM

Weber refers to ‘the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt.’

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." (Weber 1985:181 182).

We are now ruled by abstractions instead of being dependent upon each other in community. In making Faustian bargains with industry, technology and the state, we come to worship these alien powers. We think that, one day, economic growth will pay off in terms of human happiness and fulfilment. But this is instrumental power, technique, it is not a philosophy, an ethos, a way of life. In describing the impersonality of modern relations, Weber used the phrase ‘without regard for persons’. The human subject has become no more than the personification of places and structures in a bureaucratized and routinized world. For all that the modern world accumulates quantity, quantity alone cannot produce happiness. No matter how much the system feeds the wants and desires of the individual, it can never nourish the whole person. No amount of material possessions can fill the hole where the soul once was. Human beings want meaning and meaning is nothing if not personal. A world of human flourishing and fulfilment requires a system of values and a moral matrix which has regard for persons. This is the fundamental reason why the instrumental approach of technique, money and power does not deliver meaning of itself. The

technical powers of human beings are not the whole of human life, but are on one side of the subject/object, fact/value, material/spiritual divide. The human predicament in the modern world stems from not just this division between essential human attributes but the disproportion that has grown up between the human capacities. The Faustian bargain we have struck with the alien powers of the modern world – the idols of the state, bureaucracy, capital, commodities, money, possessions - means that whilst we live with more knowledge, we act with less wisdom. Our technical capacities have outstripped our moral powers. This was what worried the Church in the controversy with Galileo; this is what has continued to worry the Church.

Picture any scene from any of the many wars in recent years. Clean, clinical, surgical strikes which wipe out all and sundry at the push of a button – and from a safe distance. It isn't experienced directly, but on a television screen. Jean Baudrillard famously argued that the Gulf War (the first, we have so many we have to start giving them numbers) never took place. Baudrillard was trying to get people to understand the extent to which they had become so absorbed in a TV reality that they couldn't distinguish fact from fiction – and didn't see the need to. Well, war is anything but a fantastic hallucination, but a reality for millions of people around the world. An appreciation of the reality of war is enough to dampen uncritical assessments of human progress. Certainly, scientific knowledge and technological power have advanced to an impressive scale. But are the basic political and economic institutions really up to using this power in a creative capacity? And have moral capacities and mental capacities similarly kept pace with the power that science and technology have put at our disposal?

In *The Disinherited Mind* Erich Heller wrote:

‘Life is frightened out of its highly enlightened wits by the return of ancient nightmares: the tales of the sorcerer's apprentice, of dwarfs with magic powers. The promise of Heaven for the poor in spirit is understood to mean that, on earth at least, they should be educated into clever people able to manipulate and let loose the technical installations of Hell.’

It is apparent that human motives and impulses need to operate on a higher plane, along the lines envisaged by John von Neumann in his work on grand, long term strategic thinking. The disproportion between technical powers and moral powers invites catastrophe, particularly since the powers of the higher order are in the service of institutions of a much lower order. The human species has become an outer space civilisation with archaic emotions. What is the significance of modern, push button, television screen wars? It is that human beings utilise the most sophisticated products of inventive genius to serve and satisfy the most primitive impulses and motives. Mentalities and modalities need to be rewired so that human beings are able to live up to their historically created potentialities. The destruction which is visible all over the world is, in however negative a form, proof of the capability for positive development. When a building, an installation, infrastructure, a town or a city is destroyed by means of science based technique, this indicates the extent to which the technical mastery of nature has so far outstripped moral and social powers as to overshoot its own capacities. This points to an imbalance and disproportion in the human capacities. This lack of harmonious, even development in the human capacities threatens disintegration in the long run. The division between fact and value, matter and spirit, means and ends, object and subject needs to be repaired, with all the human capacities properly arranged and balanced. These are the dialectics of disaster. Unevenness in total development promises catastrophe, and sooner rather than later. There is a sense in which this is not a prediction but already a statement of fact. There is a common assumption that things end with a sudden bang. The global social order is already in a state of decay and disintegration. Long before economic and ecological collapse comes, there will have been a moral implosion. Sound familiar? Civilisation will collapse if rational social control and moral constraint prove insufficient to restrain and inhibit inclinations and impulses and, further, do not cultivate the intellect and the virtues necessary to keep pace with scientific advance and technological development.

Disproportionality in the development of the human capacities, the imbalance between the technical powers and the moral and social powers, means that the modern world is unable to fully realise its full creative potential. This imbalance ensures that technical capacity will continually misfire. Technological and

scientific knowledge have outstripped moral powers and also the institutional powers of society so that the human capacities work at cross purposes, backfiring with alarming regularity. The task before humanity is to ensure the social development and political embodiment of the rational and moral capacities within human society.

Can it be done? This was Nietzsche's question in conceiving the 'death of God' to be a tragedy. What he meant was that the collapse of an absolute foundation for morality – Plato's world of Being as an objective reality and the traditional religious teachings that were embedded in Christian civilisation - means that we must, in some way, become gods ourselves. Well, the irrefutable evidence of the modern world indicates very plainly that we have not become gods. I make no apologies for returning again to Jacob Bronowski at the scene of Auschwitz saying 'this is what happens when men aspire to the knowledge of gods'. There is a lazy form of saloon bar philosophy which holds that nothing has caused more trouble than religion and politics. This is fatuous and false. It is not religion and politics that is the problem but their misuse. Politics in its original sense of creative self-realisation is integral to the good life. Religion? When Gandhi was asked if he was concerned to make converts to the Hindu faith, he described this as religion at its most shallow. Real conversion would be if every Moslem, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu lived up to the ideals of their own religions. For Gandhi, quarrels over religion always indicated an absence of spirituality in the first place. This is the problem. Not religion, not politics, not science and not technology, none of these are responsible for the predicament of the modern world. It is the disproportionate development of the human powers and the division of the human experience between means and ends, fact and value, object and subject that is responsible. This is a condition of alienation. Rather than alter their social relations and structures and institutions, human beings continued to think and act through alienated social relations, making Faustian bargains with the new gods of the state, industry, economic growth, science, technique, which are our powers in alien form. And there are consequences. That's why it's called a Faustian. There's a price to be paid.

The ultimate measure of the awesome power, and the fundamental violence, of unfettered abstraction is to be found in the millions upon millions of nameless corpses which this most vicious of centuries has left as its memorial, human

sacrifices to one or another of Weber's renascent modern gods. War itself is not new, modernity's contribution is to have waged it, with characteristic efficiency, under the sign of various totalizing abstractions which name and claim the lives of all.

Sayer 1987: 154/5

This is why philosophy matters, enabling human beings to see through and break through the death dealing, destructive illusions of the politics of the cave.

The implications are spelt out by Karen Armstrong, discussing Picasso in *A Short History of Myth*:

In *Guernica*, humans and animals, both victims of indiscriminate, heedless slaughter, lie together in a mangled heap, the screaming horse inextricably entwined with the decapitated human figure. Even the sacrificial bull is doomed.

So too — Picasso may be suggesting — is modern humanity, which ... was only just beginning to explore the full potential of its self-destructive and rationally-calculated violence.

Armstrong 2005: 144/5



Guernica 1937 Picasso

Now that's what I mean about the repression of the instincts having its revenge.

The American mythologist Joseph Campbell was concerned that modern human beings, who have long since shed the *mythos* for the *logos*, have been stripped of the mythological apparatus with which to comprehend and control the same life forces that have shaped humanity in all ages and cultures. (Campbell 1972). The private, unrecognized, rudimentary dreams which have moulded the psyche throughout the ages, now nag at the modern psyche, with unpredictable results. Earlier it was pointed out that there are options other than the rational and the irrational. There are the arational and the non-rational. Science does not and can never rule alone. Whatever real is rational, wrote Hegel. Well, the irrational is real also and can only be sublimated at the expense of the some dangerous consequences, the revenge of repressed instincts and the return of dead gods and goddesses.

The modern world is increasingly abstracted from true realities, rational or otherwise, and is more and more absorbed in the manipulation of shadows and illusions. This should be called for what it is, alienation, the inversion of subject and object and the elevation of means to the status of ends. And it's self-destructive. The wielders of this modern violence remain those elite rulers, the manipulators of images and people in Plato's allegory of the cave.

We are constantly being told about 'the real world', the need to 'get real' and acknowledge political realities concerning business, competition, foreign policy and war. Whenever those words 'get real' are uttered, they are certain to be followed by some scarcely reasoned nihilism and spurious necessity in the service of some false god or other – the corporations, the City, the markets, nuclear power.... There's usually money to be made. But these are not realities, they are what are known as 'false fixities', imperatives not of nature but of particular institutions and systems in a particular time and place.

In previous ages of which we have record the fallacy of false fixity, as it may be called, is almost always at work, disguising the injustices attached to particular ways of life. It should now be possible to assess the particular costs in injustice of present ways of life and present conceptions of the good from a comparative

point of view and without self-protecting blinkers. That animals have no souls and therefore no feelings that demand respect; that primitive societies are always by nature morally inferior to advanced and civilised societies; that variations on a single pattern of sexual intercourse are unnatural perversions—these are a few of the false fixities designed to protect particular ways of life.

Hampshire 1992: 57/8

Hampshire's argument shows the value of philosophy. Philosophy as *ethos*, as a way of life, is not just any way of life – it is the philosophical way of life. And this means unmasking the fetish systems of politics and economics, of power and culture in general, which operate to conceal and preserve relations of injustice, exploitation and domination. The philosophical *ethos* points to the way of life that is free and rational for all human beings.

The issue of slavery crops up from time to time, on the occasion of some anniversary or the opening of a museum or the broadcast of some TV or radio show. How many people now make the case for slavery as being a good thing? It was the conventional wisdom at the time. And that time was a long, long time. Which begs the question as to the status of the inevitable and unalterable realities we are currently being told to accept. These are false fixities which can, as human products, in fact be changed. We are the makers of our world, by our reason and by our labour. It is for that reason we can remake the world in our own image. The imperatives are illusions, the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave, perceptions of reality shaped by the elite rulers to manage and manipulate the people.

43 ALASDAIR MACINTYRE *AFTER VIRTUE*

I want to draw the book to a conclusion with a call to enlightenment as to the nature of reality. I want to look first at philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, for whom modernity is a lost cause. MacIntyre concludes *After Virtue* by drawing parallels between the current era and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages.

If we accept the collapse of the tradition of the virtues and the commitment to the common good and its replacement by egoism and individualism, then

what matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.

And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament.

MacIntyre 1981: 263

This is why it matters to see through the illusions, to see through the people who shape the illusions. It's about time that people saw through the characters and the institutions and structures which govern the world. One hundred years ago, Rosa Luxemburg gave us the choice of socialism or barbarism. Barbarism has been in preparation for a long time now, as an alternative collectivisation to a genuine socialisation. By the fruits you shall know the tree. The lies, the wars, the extraordinary rendition, the torture perpetrated by modern governments show the barbarian hand. One frequently hears the lament that we lack democracy. We will only have democracy when the individuals who compose the *demos* are capable of leading themselves by the *nous* instead of letting business and politics lead them by the nose, the ego. The voters and consumers of the modern world are all prisoners in Plato's cave and need to cooperate and communicate to resolve the dilemma they find themselves in. Too many continue to vote for and buy politics and business as usual.

The puppeteers, the politicians. And if they are pulling our strings, who or what is pulling theirs? Well, becoming conscious is becoming enlightened. It's time to realise the goal of Socrates and bring philosophy down from the heavens and make the world philosophical, see the world around us as our world, our creation, and take moral responsibility for our powers.

44 FREEDOM AND ILLUSION

Spinoza presented a picture of human beings and human life in terms of a 'model of human nature,' a model which was ascertainable and definable and from which the laws of human behaviour could be discerned. Examining human beings as such, rather than human beings in any particular time and place, means that the human being could be understood like any other being in nature, as a member of the one species, and the laws which apply to the species apply to all in all times and places. The philosophers of the Enlightenment and after asserted that the humanity (*Humanitaet*) inherent in human beings propels them forwards to higher stages of development. The assumption is that each human being contains within himself or herself not only his or her particular individuality but also an essential humanity with the potentialities which are available to all. It follows from this essential humanity that the purpose of life is the development towards totality through individuality, what could be called unity with differentiation. In this view, all could understand the voice of humanity that each possessed within as a condition of being human.

The idea of human essence is no longer fashionable. The feminist assault on the view that biology is destiny has associated the idea with the fixing of the human identity in history and society, each individual being fitted to a social function according to their essence. This is a crude way of conceiving essence, which lacks the dynamic sense it has had since Aristotle. An essence is a potential that becomes actual in time and place. With Marx, essence is the unfolding of human nature throughout history.

‘Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature can the wealth of subjective *human* sensitivity - a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, *senses* capable of human gratification - be either cultivated or created’ (Marx EW EPM 1975).

It can be seen how the history of *industry* and the *objective* existence of industry as it has developed is the *open* book of the essential powers of man, man's

psychology present in tangible form; up to now this history has not been grasped in its connection with the *nature* of man, but only in an external utilitarian aspect, for man, moving in the realm of estrangement, was only capable of conceiving the general existence of man - religion, or history in its abstract and universal form of politics, art, literature, etc. - as the reality of man's essential powers and as *man's species-activity*. In *everyday, material industry* (which can just as easily be considered as a part of that general development as that general development itself can be considered as *a particular* part of industry, since all human activity up to now has been labour, i.e. industry, self-estranged activity) we find ourselves confronted with the *objectified powers of the human essence*, in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*, in the form of estrangement...

'Industry is the *real* historical relationship of nature, and hence of natural science, to man. If it is then conceived as the *exoteric* revelation of man's *essential powers*, the *human* essence of nature or the *natural* essence of man can also be understood. Hence natural science will lose its abstractly material, or rather idealist, orientation and become the basis of a *human* science, just as it has already become - though in an *estranged* form - the basis of actual human life. The idea of *one* basis for life and another for *science* is from the very outset a lie. Nature as it comes into being in human history - in the act of creation of human society - is the *true* nature of man; hence nature as it comes into being through industry, though in an *estranged form*, is true *anthropological* nature.'

Marx EW EPM 1975

The concept of essence is crucial to Marx's critique of alienation and to his view of human history as the self-realisation of the human faculties in all directions. Which is to make the point that there is plenty to lose if we easily dispense with essentialism. In the sixties there was quite a fad for existentialism, the idea that existence comes before essence and that one chooses one's identity. The world is what we choose. Scott Meikle writes well in defence of essentialism:

During most of the twentieth century the social and historical pressures at work have seen to it that the bureaucrat of knowledge has been in the

ascendant, and that essentialism has accordingly been put at a discount. The bureaucrat of knowledge has a vested interest in things being complicated rather than simple; just as a pretentious but unaccomplished *savant* will have a vested interest in the truth being unsayable.

There has been a political basis for this. 'Multiple causality', an accidental interweaving of 'many factors', and a suspension of talk about real essences, suited Social Democracy as much as it suited Stalinism. If the society is essentially something, or is something essentially, then however much you may mess around with it in all sorts of ways, you do not alter what it is unless you change that something. For believers in 'socialism in one country', whether the German social democrat of Weimar or the Stalinist inside or outside the Soviet Union, it was convenient not to be too clear about essential natures. It was even more convenient not to have them around at all, since it is then easier to blur the line between changes that change only accidents or appearances of the system and changes that change its nature. The more 'multi-factoral the supposed reality, the wider the range of political goal packages you can entertain and sell.

Meikle 1985 ch 1

To abandon essentialism is to assign an awful amount of power and freedom to culture and to politics. The idea of human nature is a critical concept which makes it possible to criticise any social order that contradicts the human ontology and to work towards the creation of a social order that corresponds to the human ontology.

Another reason why the idea of a human nature or human essence has been rendered 'problematic', to use a popular term in academic debates (all philosophical notions are problematic, if it isn't problematic it isn't philosophy) is because of an increasing scepticism towards metaphysics, or an increasing inability to deal with something as complex and abstract as metaphysics. This represents a great loss. As EW Tomlin wrote: 'Apart from metaphysical presuppositions there can be no civilisation' (Tomlin 1947: 264).

This is a large claim that some people have made for religion. The claims are contestable, of course, but another reason for the eclipse of the idea of human essence is the loss of the religious experience and, with it, the foregrounding of human nature in the Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Moslem and Hindu worldviews. Contemporary thinkers without – or hostile to – religious accounts of human nature tend to think of human beings as a *tabula rasa* on which each culture writes its text. Each individual can write the lines of his or her own life. Apparently liberatory, such a notion denudes the concept of humanity of content and substance. This is a very different notion to Nietzsche's command to 'become what you are'. This implies that human beings are actually something, at least in potential. 'Become what you want to be' is a completely different notion. I may want to be the invisible man or Fred Flinstone or Jennifer Aniston's dog Norm. It won't happen. The mind can take us into places where our real identities can't go. Mental institutions have been full of people who have thought themselves to be Napoleon, Stalin, Hitler and various other political and religious leaders. The real Hitlers and Stalins, of course, have been considered perfectly sane and sober and have led nations, been decorated and had statues erected in public squares in their honour, but that says more about the collective psyche.

Human behaviour can be understood precisely because it is human, the behaviour of a species that can be characterised in terms of its essential potentialities and capacities.

The most common error in history has been to take a specific instance of human behaviour – usually the worst examples – and put it down to human nature. Old Adam gets the blame for everything. 'You'll never change human nature'. It's lazy thinking. The expression of human nature differs in time and place and changes over history. The current favourite is footballers wages in England. Of course players are going to break contracts for more money, 'it's human nature'. You'd do it, I'd do it, everyone would do it. The fact that it's not being done in German football to anything like the same extent indicates that human nature comes in many varieties. How human nature is manifested depends on any number of things in the whole social and

cultural matrix. What aspects of human nature are developed and realised in society depends upon things such as social institutions, education, moral codes and social norms, political institutions, laws. Human behaviour can be checked, restrained, guided, canalised, both for good and for ill. Human nature in itself explains nothing. Human nature in itself justifies nothing. Human nature is not an argument. No murderer will be acquitted by an appeal to human nature. Nevertheless, those standards of good and bad embodied and expressed in any society depend upon a conception of the human essence.

In arguing for the existence of a human nature, Marx did not identify the human essence with its particular manifestations. Rather, Marx differentiated 'human nature in general' from 'human nature as modified in each historical epoch.' Human nature in general we can never see, of course, because what we observe are always the specific manifestations of human nature in various cultures. But we can infer from these various manifestations what this 'human nature in general' is, what the laws are which govern it, what the needs are which human beings have as human beings. (Clark 2002)

In his earlier writings Marx still called 'human nature in general' the 'essence of man.' In time, Marx lessened his use of this term because he wanted to emphasise the point that 'the essence of man is no *abstraction* inherent in each separate individual.' The human essence is not an immutable, unchanging substance that lacks a history. For Marx, as for Aristotle before him, human nature is a given potential, a set of conditions inherent in all human beings. The potential cannot be changed, but it can be actualised in myriad ways. The throwaway remark 'you can't change human nature' is falsified by history. Human beings do change in the course of history. Human beings are not just the products of history, they are the producers of history, transforming themselves as they transform the world around them. Becoming what you are means that each individual becomes what he or she has the potential to be. *Being* is the point, as Heidegger was at pains to argue in *Being and Time*. Philosophers argue endlessly about what it is 'to be' but never get round to actually 'being'.

History is the process of human self-creation, human beings developing the potentialities given to them by virtue of being human. As Marx argued: '*The whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour, and the emergence of nature for man; he therefore has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation of his own origins.*'

Changing oneself is conditional upon acting to change's one's circumstances, actualising one's potential to be in the process. This is a matter of essential capacity rather than wishful thinking. One can refer here to Spinoza's argument that *intellectual* knowledge is conducive to change to the extent that it is also *affective* knowledge. By itself, intellectual knowledge does not produce any change, neither in self nor circumstances. The greatest merit of intellectual knowledge as such lies in making it possible for a person to comprehend and control any unconscious strivings, canalising them in a more positive direction. Spinoza's intellectual appreciation of reality is also an affective appreciation which brings joy. The wise and free person will avoid pain and aim necessarily 'to act well and to rejoice' (*bene agere ac laetari*). To act well is to enjoy oneself fully, and to enjoy oneself fully is to act well: 'there cannot be too much joy: it is always good: but melancholy is always bad' (E Pt IV Prop XLII). Melancholy, depression, is the disease of the modern world. Historian Barbara Ehrenreich calls this 'an epidemic of melancholy' (Ehrenreich 2008 ch 7).

The value of this depends upon one's reading of Freud. Freud seems to be committed to the view that not only does reason not govern the world, it is not even the master of its own home. Most of what human beings do is the product of unconscious forces. Human *subjectivity* is thus determined by *objective* factors - objective in the sense of proceeding behind one's back, determining thoughts, feelings and actions regardless of conscious purpose and intention. Philosophy from this perspective is little more than the self-image of human beings which serves to flatter *homo sapiens* as a rational, reasoning species. We should beware mistaking the mask for the real person. Freud's psychology stings the human pride which rests on the ability to think and to choose. Far from being

free, human beings appear to be part of a puppet show, influenced by forces unknown to the consciousness. Plato's cave as a mental and psychic prison seems currently to be being reworked by neuro-reductionists and neuro-determinists who make human beings no more than their neural networks. Incapable of freedom, human beings invent rationalisations to give themselves the illusion of freedom. Plato's cave, the envatted brain, Descartes' demon, Francis Crick's 'pack of neurons'. All of them in one way or another imprison human beings within a world of inescapable illusion. Human beings celebrate the notion of choice and connect it with freedom. It is not so much that people believe this notion to be true, but that they want to believe it to be true. It reassures people to believe that they have chosen as autonomous beings to do what they do for rational or moral reasons.

On this reasoning there is no way out of Plato's cave. Human beings not only mistake the illusion for the reality, they think themselves to be free thinking and choosing beings, rationalising that they are in some way guiding the direction of the shadows on the wall. However, there is more to Freud than this picture of human powerlessness in face of unconscious forces determining thought and action. For Plato, the prisoners of the cave can become conscious of the forces which operate behind their backs – that is, in becoming aware of the fire, the puppeteers, the projector, they come to understand the true nature of the shadows on the wall, tracing them to source. This was Freud's point with respect to increasing awareness human beings can have of unconscious forces. In becoming aware, human beings cease to be helpless puppets directed by unconscious forces, that consciousness serving to enlarge the realm of freedom. In the process of becoming aware, human beings become free, autonomous beings determining their own future according to their predispositions and proclivities. Biology in this sense really isn't destiny; it is a potential for a future designed to correspond to the human ontology. The best writing in neuroscience recognises the importance of social relationships, experiences, influences and environments. Nothing at all is given by neural networks, it all depends on the social, ethical and institutional matrix within which human beings are set.

Freud expressed the idea of the unconscious determining the conscious in the statement, 'Where there is Id there shall be Ego.' This idea does not, however,

originate with Freud. It is integral to the work of the philosopher Spinoza, who argued that men 'are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined.' This means that the ordinary man and woman of common sense are not free, but live under the illusion of being free on account of being motivated and directed by unconscious forces operating behind their conscious mind. The 'real world' in which the person of common sense lives is Plato's cave. What he or she sees to their front is mere illusion; they are unconscious of the forces that control them behind their backs. This fact of unconscious motivation and direction constitutes human bondage. Freedom is not attained in the rationalisations of the shadows on the part of the prisoners, but their increasing awareness of the reality inside and outside of the human cave.

Whether one looks at Spinoza, Marx or Freud, the enlarging of the sphere of human freedom over against human enslavement amounts to the same Platonic demand to see beyond the veil of illusion presented by the real world of the senses and to become aware of the forces which operate outside of the conscious self, direct our desires, passions and interests behind our backs. To the extent that we adjust to the world of shadows and take it to be the 'real world', we are not free, we are prisoners. However, reason is not powerless but can train and direct and control sense experience. By becoming aware of what is truly real, human beings can emerge from this physical and psychic enslavement and enlarge the realm of freedom in the process. This means discarding illusions, and by transforming ourselves from unthinking, unfree, determined, passive prisoners into philosophising, free, determining, active beings. This is *Being* as an active, ongoing, enlarging condition. Since Plato, the aim of philosophy as philosophising has been emancipation from enslavement in the first instance and freedom as self-determination in the final analysis.

A condition of freedom is the shedding of illusions to enable the full and conscious exercise of our active powers. Which of course begs the question as to what these illusions are. As we near the conclusion, it is only being consistent to the philosophical purpose to render 'problematic' something that a couple of

hundred pages of text seems to have made clear. Philosophising never ends. As I said, it is a part of 'Being' as an active, ongoing process of living.

The illusions are the shadows. But what are the shadows? It depends on how the prisoners have come to rationalise them, interpreting the illusory reality in order to give it meaning and order and make some sense of it. These rationalisations are not real, they are 'made up'. Just as the whole of human history and culture is made up. Is it all illusion?

Freud wrote of mental health and mental sickness in making the case that human beings can overcome the determination by unconscious forces. Becoming aware of what is real but unconscious, human beings learn to identify and abandon illusions. As a therapist, Freud understood that becoming aware of the unconscious is integral to the healing of mental illness. He applied the same reasoning to social philosophy: by becoming aware of reality, human beings identify and overcome their illusions and thus gain the strength to face life as active, autonomous beings. So far so good. Freud's clearest statement of these views came in *The Future of an Illusion*, the illusion in question being religion. Freud felt that religion had no future once human beings became aware of its illusory character. And this is the contentious issue. In abstract, it is easy to split up life between illusions on the one hand and realities on the other. Human beings seduced by illusions are enslaved. Abandon illusions for realities and the gates to the realm of freedom open wide. The process of emancipation is not so simple. Is religion an illusion or an integral, ineliminable part of the human experience?

Freud writes here: 'Perhaps those who do not suffer from the neurosis will need no intoxicant to deaden it. They will, it is true, find themselves in a difficult situation. They will have to admit to themselves the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe; they can no longer be the centre of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. But surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. Men cannot remain children

forever; they must in the end go out into "hostile life." We may call this "education to reality."

Freud is here expressing the basic thought of rationalism, dividing the forces of ignorance and superstition (religion) on one side, and the forces of truth, reason and knowledge (science) on the other. The problem is that the argument, couched in terms of progress from childhood (religion) to maturity (science) makes little sense in historical terms. Since the days of Paleolithic art, science and religion have gone hand in hand. Science has been around as long as religion and both have existed alongside each other. The idea that one replaces the other through some kind of intellectual progress is anthropologically illiterate. If it were true, science would have triumphed at the beginning of civilisation, not the end. Socrates' moral philosophy was a reaction to the very real advances that the natural philosophers had made. Ancient Greek scientists like Pythagoras, Thales, Anaximander, Democritus and many others made discoveries which still possess the capacity to startle. Democritus on atoms for instance. Marx too thought in terms of human history as a growth to maturity. Until the realm of freedom, human beings are living in a prehistory, Marx argues. The same idea is expressed in Kant's motto of enlightenment.

But the idea of history as a growth from childhood to maturity is misconceived. The clash between the Church and Galileo was discussed earlier. There is a tendency to see this conflict as one between the ignorance and superstition of religion and the reason and knowledge of science. Yet the views that the Church had propounded over the centuries were the views of scientists, scientists whose work had been eclipsed, but scientists nonetheless, Ptolemy, Aristotle et al. Further, as Paul Feyerabend argued, with respect to reason and evidence, the Church was on much stronger ground than Galileo. Indeed, many scientists, such as Kepler, had already rejected Galileo's theory as wrong. And we know that Galileo rested his case on a theory of the tides which was rejected at the time and which we now know was wrong. In large part, Galileo played a hunch and got it right. The Church was on the side of reason, Galileo on the side of inspiration and imagination.

In his 1975 book *Against Method*, Feyerabend examined the evidence of the clash between the Church and Galileo and drew a startling conclusion. Given the scientific evidence and the character of the argument, Galileo's arrest and conviction 'rational and just': 'The Church at the time of Galileo was much more faithful to reason than Galileo himself.'

This unusual story doesn't end here. Back in 1990, the current Pope, Benedict XVI, when he was Cardinal Ratzinger, made a speech which condemned Feyerabend's conclusions as 'drastic' since he knew well that Galileo had been right. Further, against Church hardliners, Ratzinger proceeded to declare that the faith 'does not grow from resentment and the rejection of rationality'. To the non-obscurantist, indeed, to anyone with the ability to read, the Pope's speech was a clear and unambiguous defence of Galileo and scientific rationality.

Many years later, in January 2008, the Pope's 1990 speech became a cause for controversy. A week before Pope Benedict XVI was due to visit La Sapienza, Rome's oldest university, a group of students taped a banner to the bronze statue of Minerva at the centre of the university. The banner read: 'Knowledge needs neither fathers nor priests. Knowledge is secular.'

The student protestors were soon supported by scores of faculty members and professors, seeing an opportunity to engage in a little safe and phoney radicalism, who put their names to a letter objecting to the Pope's visit in the strongest of terms. The letter was published in the daily newspaper *la Repubblica*. The Pope's presence at the university would be 'incongruous', the letter proclaimed. The Vatican's Secretary of State cancelled the visit on the grounds that 'the conditions for a dignified and peaceful welcome were lacking'. The students and professors cheered at this victory for the principle that 'knowledge is secular'.

Not long after, this triumphalism was replaced by a sheepish and shaming embarrassment. These intellectual titans of secular knowledge had completely misread what the Pope had actually said in the 1990 speech. They had taken the Pope to be saying precisely what he what he was criticising. The advocates of knowledge had based their protest not on reason but on their own prejudices.

The Pope had *criticised* the arguments of Paul Feyerabend. The protestors had taken Feyerabend's words to be those of the Pope simply because this fitted their prejudices that the Church is 'anti-science', whereas they, the secularists, are the voice of reason. They had led a protest on the basis of errors, falsehoods and prejudices. Among the sixty-seven signatories to the letter was Luciano Maiani, the physicist in charge of Italy's main scientific research body. The whole episode shows the anti-religious bigotry of scientists and secularists in a poor light. Read the message on the banner again: 'Knowledge needs neither fathers nor priests. Knowledge is secular.' The students, faculty members and professors proclaiming the superiority of secular knowledge were made to look very foolish, very prejudiced, and very bigoted. Anything but rational and reasonable.

Secular or sacred, scientific or religious, human beings are all too human. Kant had a wonderful line here, out of nothing so crooked can something entirely straight be made. The crooked timber of humanity. The episode above shows that secularists and scientists can be just as crooked as fathers and priests. Science vs religion is a misguided, phoney war. The two are compatible, approaching the same reality from different angles, using different methods. Philosophy is the mediating term between faith and knowledge. It is important to recognise that bigots come in all shapes and sizes and that we should be able to identify and resist bigotry in all its forms. The problem with fanatics and fundamentalists is that they shout so loud we cannot hear their message.

Apart from anything else, the balance of evidence and reason *was* on the side of the Church against Galileo. Feyerabend was unfairly criticised by Ratzinger, who went too far to demonstrate the Church's scientific credentials. And for his troubles, Ratzinger was rewarded with a demonstration of scientific bigotry, prejudice and stupidity. So blinded with their hatred of the Church were the protestors, professors included, that they couldn't understand what was set out in the plainest of language – that the Church backed scientific rationality and Galileo against Feyerabend's claims. In the name of knowledge!

Incredible! It makes one wonder how far scientific hubris can go, once legal, moral and rational constraints are weakened.

Science has been around a long, long time. If science was going to eclipse religion as an illusion, it would have done so by now. Illusion comes in many forms. Scientists are as prone to illusion as anyone. And delusion and prejudice and bigotry. Reason needs to be rational about itself. It was once thought that the work of the astronomers Kepler, Copernicus, Brahe, Galileo et al would have finished off the belief in God in His heaven. It didn't. I haven't seen God, the astronaut Yuri Gagarin is reported to have said. (I believe it was a Soviet politician determined to prove the truth of atheistic materialism). We have been to the moon and back and still religion carries on. Maybe because it addresses something within the human being – spirit, soul anyone? – than the facts of the without. Above and beyond physical realities, there are psychic realities that keep human beings searching for meaning.

Returning to Freud's attack on religion as an illusion: 'Our God, Logos, is perhaps not a very almighty one, and he may only be able to fulfil a small part of what his predecessors have promised. If we have to acknowledge this we shall accept it with resignation. We shall not on that account lose our interest in the world and in life . . . no, our science is no illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere.'

Perhaps, as we draw to a close, we are returning to physicist Frank Tipler's point that God does not create life but that the purpose of life is to create God. For Ludwig Feuerbach, God was an ideal projection of all the best qualities of human beings. The more that human beings live up to that ideal in themselves, the less God is something abstract and external. We become as gods.

Feuerbach's ideas were taken further by Marx. Marx too criticised religion as an illusion. However, following Feuerbach's argument, Marx's position is much more sophisticated than the science versus religion antithesis.

The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against *that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.

Religious suffering is at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore in *embryo* the *criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusion man, so that he will think, act and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.

It is therefore the *task of history*, once the *other-world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. It is the immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.

Marx EW CHPR:I 1975

Apologies for the long quote, but it is so beautifully written that it would have been a crime to paraphrase it. And a full quote is required so that Marx's meaning is properly understood. In a very superficial sense, Marx's argument seems to be the same as Freud's repudiation of religion as an illusion. It is, in truth, very different. For Marx, religious illusion embodies essential human needs and strivings which are frustrated in the real world. Marx is demanding the world be made to conform to the ideal embodied in the illusory happiness of religion, that heaven be brought down to earth. Thus the criticism of heaven is turned into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion is turned into the criticism of politics. 'On earth as it is in Heaven'. Marx argued that philosophy is abolished by being realised. Here he is arguing that religion is abolished by the realisation of its ideals – heart and soul are realised in real conditions. Marx could not argue this if religion is nothing but an illusion. Rather than argue that religion as such is an illusion, Marx has identified the human ideals which religion embodies and the psychic realities it addresses to demand that, rather than as existing as an other-worldly compensation for their absence in the real world, these ideals be made incarnate.

Other aspects of Marx's argument here do savour a great deal of Freud

The reform of consciousness consists *entirely* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in *explaining* its own actions to it. Like Feuerbach's critique of religion, our whole aim can only be to translate religious and political problems into their self-conscious human form.

Our programme must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas but by analysing mystical consciousness obscure to itself, whether it appear in religious or political form. It will then become plain that the world has long since dreamed of something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality. It will then become plain that our task is not to draw a sharp mental line between past and future but to *complete* the thought of the past. Lastly, it will become plain that mankind will not begin any *new* work, but will consciously bring about the completion of its old work.

We are therefore in a position to sum up the credo of our journal in a *single word*: the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age. This is a task for the world and for us. It can succeed only as the product of united efforts. What is needed above all is a *confession*, and nothing more than that. To obtain forgiveness for its sins mankind needs only to declare them for what they are.

Marx EW Letters 1975

In fine, Marx and Freud are in agreement that the way human beings think and act is, in ordinary conditions, largely determined by forces operating behind their back, without their knowledge; this is the image of the prisoners in Plato's cave, the puppeteers behind them projecting shadows on the wall. To the extent that the prisoners make sense of these shadows, interpreting them in various ways to give meaning, these are what Freud calls rationalizations and Marx calls ideology or false consciousness. However, the fantastical rationalisation of reality can never bring freedom, only bondage. Human beings enchained by illusion are determined by forces which are unknown to them. Freedom can only be achieved if human beings become aware of the forces motivating and directing their thoughts and actions, that is, by achieving true knowledge of reality. In the process, human beings become the conscious agents of history rather than being the slaves of blind circumstances. In *The East India Company - Its History and Results*, Marx condemned those communities which 'subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances' (Marx AIC SE 1973).

The crucial difference between Marx and Freud lies in their identification of the specific forces which are responsible for unconscious determination. Freud identifies these forces as physiological (libido) and biological (death instinct and life instinct). Marx locates determinism in the process of historical development. For Marx, achieving freedom as self-determination requires more than consciousness raising. It is not consciousness that determines being, but *social* being that determines consciousness, that is, being which is already

shot-through with will, intention, purpose. Human consciousness is determined by *social* being, the social here referring to norms, values, relations in the practice of life.

I would like to bring this book to a conclusion by discussing intellect and illusion with respect to ideas and language. Reference was made earlier to George Orwell's view as expressed in *Politics and the English Language* that 'political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable'. Not politics, not religion, not science, not football, not anything is responsible for conflict, murder, oppression, cruelty and violence in the world; it is the misuse of human faculties and capacities that is responsible, however these prejudices, hatreds and delusions are rationalised at the surface level. And this points to the misuse of the intellect, of ideas and of words and language. That's where lies and murder come from, that's the ultimate price of illusion.

Words denote reality, they are not the reality they denote. Words are pictures and pictures are not the world, they depict the world. Magritte's painting 'This is not a pipe' makes the point.



The painting is entitled *The Use of Words*. It could easily have been entitled *The Misuse of Words*. Magritte painted a picture of a pipe. The painting of the pipe is not a pipe. For the same reason, the word 'pipe' is not a pipe. Extend this reasoning throughout all life. Words are representations of reality and not

the reality itself. Words approximate reality; sometimes words completely misidentify reality. The fetishism of words invites a misunderstanding of reality through conflating words and things. Take this fetishism further into the realm of ideas and the real reason for the conflict supposedly caused by politics and religion becomes clear.

‘Ye cannot serve two masters’ it is written in the gospel of Matthew. A choice has to be made between God and mammon. The word mammon is a transliteration of *mamona*, the Hebrew for profit. Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* and Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic* chart the vicissitudes of the belief in God in the context of an emerging commercial civilisation worshipping mammon. Throughout this period, most people continued to believe in God; at the same time, regardless of this belief, people organised their patterns of life within an economy devoted to making money. The belief in God had little impact upon the conduct of everyday practical life. The pursuit of mammon was decisive. Ideas and realities parted company. The obvious thing to do here is to condemn capitalism as a ‘godless’ materialism and the worship of money, capital, commodities as idolatry. They may well be. But the extent to which people who went to Church subscribed to words, beliefs, ideas which they did not live up to, bringing them in accordance with in their practical lives, indicates the extent to which God had become an idol long before Nietzsche declared the death of God. God is dead, and we killed him! states Nietzsche. God had been dead for some time, killed by being made an idol, not an idol of stone but of words, phrases, dogma and doctrine empty of substance. God’s name is taken in vain every time people proclaim their belief in God but do not live in accordance with that belief. There is no reality in the words. This is an idolatry of words.

Which returns us to the ancient Greek notion of *ethos* as a practice, a way of life, a way of experiencing the world. That experiencing is the living truth behind words. The experiencing forms the substance. An attempt has been made throughout this book to identify philosophy as philosophising, an active process which is integral to Being. Philosophy is not just about the language and the concepts, the terms, techniques and methods. It has these

as tools and instruments, of course, and they are often highly sophisticated. But none of these are philosophy as such. Mountaineering is about climbing a mountain in order to achieve a summit. The equipment is a means to the end of the summit. It is better to have sophisticated tools than crude and blunt instruments, but not essential. George Mallory got close to climbing Everest with the crudest of equipment. Because he was a mountaineer. Most important of all is to have the root of the matter in you.

Philosophy is philosophising about life. About living, about Being. How does this work? By recognizing oneself as part of something bigger, humanity, life, God/Nature as Spinoza conceives it, living in accordance to a set of values which integrate the full experience of truth, justice, love, making flourishing the dominant goal of life to which all things are subordinated. Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, an organic, essential striving, is resonant here, in that there is a purposeful striving to develop one's powers of reason, labour and love to a point at which one taps into the harmony within the world. This is not to aspire to the knowledge of gods at all. We can use our powers as means to the ends of harmony, but having to be in thrall to them. This means striving for humility rather than hubris, identifying our being with all beings, dispensing with the illusion of a separate, craving, desiring ego.

For self-styled cynics and realists, such fine words themselves bear no relation to any identifiable, possible reality. They are dismissed as millenarian yearnings which promise heaven but seem always to bring about hell on earth. That is the moral of Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. Voltaire accused Rousseau of wanting us back on all fours crawling around in pristine nature. Voltaire claimed to have lost the habit. Most of us have. (Is that progress? Whereas individuals from hunter-gatherer backgrounds have shown an aptitude for our push-button culture and fitted easily into our modern, technological, sophisticated societies, not many civilised men and women could adapt easily to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. In relying upon useful things, we have become useless people.)

Voltaire completely misunderstood Rousseau, whose argument is organised around the transition from a natural state to the civil state as an expansion of freedom in common. Rousseau's concern was to continue this transition so as to

create a civil state that enhanced rather than inhibited human nature. It was not a case of going back to nature but of going forward to the full realisation of human nature. Contemporary commercial civilisation contradicted the human ontology and still does. There is a need to go forward to create the social order that corresponds to and enhances the human ontology.

Such a notion has nothing to do with some inchoate yearning for a lost Edenic past. That yearning exists, no doubt. The notions of going back and going home are ineliminable features of the human psyche. This was Heidegger's point in arguing that human beings are ontologically nostalgic. There is no going back, but there is a possibility of building a home in the world. This was the purpose of Hegel's critique of alienation, human beings through reason coming to recognise the world as their own.

The story of the expulsion from Eden contains an essential truth – that human beings can never again return to the primordial innocence of paradise and hence must resolve the problem of being human, of being knowledgeable but not all-knowing, of being powerful, but not all-powerful. Human beings can never attain harmony by eliminating this essential humanity. This reveals the extent to which hubris is a militant denial of human fallibility, human fallenness. Hubris does not deliver the harmony human beings need. There is no going back to Eden, but can Eden be recreated in the future, with a new harmony based upon a sense of humility? This is to aspire to the knowledge of human beings, not of gods. By moving forward in this sense it is possible for human beings to flourish, by developing freely and fully essential human potentialities and capacities, becoming truly human by achieving a new harmony with each other and with nature, at last at home in the world.

As in religion, so in politics. The fetishism of words distances human beings from true realities and divides them against each other and against themselves. In a rock concert by the band Queen, the guitarist Brian May – highly intelligent man and PhD astronomer – dedicated a song to all those who have died for their beliefs. Those words were received with mass cheers and applause. The crowd knew what Brian May *meant*, but the words convey much more than that particular meaning – i.e. people who take a stand on freedom, justice, peace and so on. How many white

South Africans died for their belief in apartheid? Many tyrants in history have not lacked courage and have been prepared to face death for what they believe in. What about Hitler, making his last stand in his bunker? To die for a belief reveals nothing about the quality of that belief, only the commitment of those to that belief. Brian May doesn't mean to include Hitler, of course, but the words he used apply to Hitler as much as to Victor Jara, Chico Mendez and all the other good guys.

Words mislead. And misleading words are a menace in politics as they are in religion. Solution? The gap between words and reality needs always to be diminished. Kenneth Clark in *Civilisation* argues: 'If I had to say which was telling the truth about society, a speech by a Minister of Housing or the actual buildings put up in his time, I should believe the buildings.' We are what we do. There is a saying that well done is better than well said. Even better is to identify the one with the other, well said is well done, or at least ought to be. Practice what you preach. Words have to be connected with the deeds and considered part of the total character of the person who uses them. Words have meaning only in this context of character and deed. Without this unity, words are prone to deceive in their abstraction, deceiving oneself as much as others, concealing realities instead of revealing them. This is what Marx called ideology, the systematic misunderstanding of reality in order to conceal its nature and structure, thereby preserving existing power relations. Ideology is the antithesis of the recognition of reality, and the search for reality is the pursuit of truth which has characterised philosophising from the first. This search and this pursuit constitutes human development. To find reality and attain truth is the negation of ideology.

This book has cited a range of philosophers, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and so on. The consistent thread running through the work of these philosophers has been enlightenment conceived as the ability to see through and break through the deceiving immediacy of the senses and of 'common sense' to achieve a clear and distinct perception of human and natural, spiritual and material reality. This pursuit is not exclusive to philosophers. The great religious leaders and sages have spoken of 'the light' and 'the way', Moses the lawgiver, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, scientists, physicists, biologists, chemists, psychologists, artists, poets like Blake – different methods and

techniques, same goal. This, in the end, is the reply to our friend, the ‘ordinary’ man or woman of the ‘real world’ of ‘common sense. Everything that the human race has achieved, in every field, can be attributed to the destroyers of illusions and the seekers of true reality. The person of common sense owes these thinkers a massive debt, but just doesn’t know it, doesn’t see it. Just as he or she doesn’t see beyond sense experience to apprehend the truth that lies behind the ‘real world’. Philosophy’s pursuit of truth is a search for reality, for the ultimate reality behind ‘the real world’. Uncovering the veil is a shedding of illusions. But philosophising as a process does not just produce truth and knowledge, as in some academic exercise; it transforms those who philosophise in the process. This is the point made earlier that for Spinoza *intellectual* knowledge is also *affective* knowledge in that it brings about change in the knowledgeable person.

The scales are removed from the eyes and the world is seen as it is and as it could be. Plato’s words in the *Symposium* express the point well: ‘beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.’ The eye of the mind brings forth not images, but realities. This is the answer to the man and woman of ignorant ‘common sense’ – only those who have opened the eye of the mind merits the title ‘realist.’ Only those who have the courage to use their own understanding (Kant’s motto of enlightenment) and use their own intellectual and affective powers to apprehend reality have earned the right to be called realists. Ultimately, the true philosopher can turn the command back upon our barbarians of common sense, you should live in the real world. The only qualifications are the nerve and the nous to employ the ‘common moral reason’ which is the birthright of all.

45 THE IMPORTANCE OF IDEAS

The warnings about the future that have been made in this book are hardly news. Armageddon has come every day for millions of human beings throughout the last century and the slaughterbench of history continues into this century. It is hardly news that the world has delivered plenty of things other than progress in the past century or so.

When Picasso saw the Palaeolithic art in the caves at Lascaux he remarked ‘We have invented nothing. We have made no progress in culture, although we have invented organized war on a massive scale’.

Well over 100 million human beings were killed in the twentieth century, and the world remains caught in the maelstrom unleashed by the ‘Great War’ of 1914-18. War on this scale is not accidental but requires technical, institutional and psychological preparation. War, violence and death have been normalised, but at a distance. In terms of per head figures, violent death is decreasing. It is in the abstracting systems of politics and economics that violence is increasing. The impersonal world is outstripping the personal world in the scale of its destruction. This demonstrates the violence and tyranny of abstraction. (Critchley, P. 2004., *The City of Reason* vol 5 *The Economic Concept of the City*, chapter 8).

Numbers on this scale are reached only if war – that Orwellian politics which makes murder respectable – is pursued as a conscious end and systematic purpose. With all of their mass of means and scientific rationality, modern rational humanity has invented nothing but organised war on a mass scale. The modern world is characterized by technology, war and death. The scale of man-made death is the central moral as well as material fact of our time.

But rather than conclude on this note of pessimism, it cannot be emphasised enough that the scale of human problems in the present is also at the same time a measure of human possibilities for the future. No-one exposed the positive implications of alienation better than Marx.

In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving-and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery

and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted.... We know that to work well the new-fangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by new-fangled men - and such are the working men.

Marx Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper* AB SE 1973

The world is still waiting for the proletarian transformation envisaged by Marx. Twentieth century socialist politics increasingly became a case of *chercher le proletariat*. But before we conclude that the time has come and gone, we should look more closely at Plato's statement that philosophy begins in wonder. By this, Plato does not mean some kind of wondrous rapture. Plato's philosophy begins by wondering about the facts of the world we live in and which, in our passive state, we take as given. These facts are not immutable and unalterable and need not be taken for being fixed. Much that seems unchangeable is actually transient. There is also a need to appreciate much that we take for granted, some of the greatest achievements of human history. Peace, freedom, justice, law, democracy are the product of the efforts of principled men and women throughout the ages. These too may also be transient, particularly if we fail to value them. These things exist only because certain people wondered about the world they lived in and took the view that it could be better than it is, that we could be better than we are. These people were moved by ideas that they were prepared to live and die for, ideas that were worth living by and dying for, but not killing. There is a difference between dying for one's principles and killing for them.

This book began with Socrates and the stand he took on moral principle. In taking this stand, Socrates defined philosophy in terms of morality, something which contradicts those who would reduce the world to mechanism, cause and effect and function. Science could not then and cannot now explain the stand that Socrates took, because it was a stand taken on ground on which science is silent – moral principle. And the world is a better place for Socrates' stand. Human beings live by ideas, they live by values. This is what makes human beings human.

In *50 Philosophical Ideas* Ben Dupré argues that ‘the Athenian state regarded Socrates as so baneful an influence that they executed him. Not many of today's philosophers are executed for their beliefs, which is a pity - to the extent, at least, that it is a measure of how much the sense of danger has ebbed away.’ But it is not clear that this sense of danger has gone away at all, as the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa makes clear. It all depends on who counts as a philosopher and what counts as philosophy. Many principled people have met an untimely death in recent times. In the first half of the twentieth century, any number of thinkers and activists were murdered or executed or imprisoned and persecuted for their beliefs – Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, a whole number of Bolsheviks in the show trials, Trotsky. Perhaps Dupré's words apply only to those academic philosophers in securely tenured professorships in the universities. But remember that Socrates was no ivory tower philosopher; Socrates took philosophy to the streets. Not many of academic philosophers are executed for their seminar papers; instead, they tend to get promoted for the boosted RAE rating they earn for their department, which is a pity

The impulses that abolished slavery and fought injustice and oppression wherever they could be found, which fought genocide, capital punishment and torture all the world over, led to changes within and between nations, in national and international law. Such advances are under constant assault as powerful forces seek to turn the clock back in order to protect their interests. It's possible. Look at the given world and wonder. Battles which have been fought and won are never won forever. Justice, democracy, freedom, law are not given for all time. They are always contestable, and they are always contested. The biggest assault at present is coming from a ‘libertarian’ assault on regulation, constraint and government. These forces believe not in any genuine anarchism but in the anarchy of the rich and powerful. Where there is no system of universal law and morality, power decides. It is a long hard road to peace, freedom and democracy. It takes no time at all to revert to the oldest doctrine in the book, ‘might is right’. This is the view of Thrasymachus which Plato contested, the idea that justice is the interests of the strongest. For Plato, justice is *the* social virtue par excellence. It is easy to succumb to pessimism. In an unequal world organised around asymmetries in power and resources, the doctrine ‘might is right’ is always lurking behind laws and institutions. But if the battle for justice and equality could be

fought and won more than a few times before, it could certainly be fought and won again at a time when the world is becoming global and in the process bringing us closer together — if only we can take ideas seriously in the effort to create a new world.

Presenting philosophy as the act of philosophising in the thick of ‘the real world’ makes it clear that philosophical arguments draw heavily from extra-philosophical terrains, not just from domains like religion and science and art etc but from problems and issues arising in social and political life. For Karl Popper ‘genuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy, and they die if these roots decay’. Popper demonstrates this proposition by explaining Plato’s theory of forms as a response to the crisis caused in Greek physics and mathematics by the discovery of irrational numbers. Imagine the stir that concern with global inequality and environmental destruction could cause.

How far can philosophy be connected to extra-philosophical domains and disciplines and problems whilst remaining a distinctive subject in its own right? In asking the question I am thinking of Marx’s argument that philosophy is abolished by being realised; the actualisation of philosophy is the abolition of philosophy. Philosophy exists in the gap between the ‘is’ of the real world of common sense and the ‘ought to be’ revealed by thinking. Marx’s demand that philosophy become worldly and the world become philosophical amounts to a demand that the gap between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought to be’ be removed. Isn’t that the point of philosophy, its liberatory premise and promise? Plato’s cave is the world of Becoming which, through the exercise of reason, we leave for the world of Being.

Marx developed what has been called the ‘philosophy of praxis’. This refers to the unity of theory and practice. Whatever else this is, it is not academic ivory tower philosophy. It should come as no surprise that when the political tide turned in the 1980s and 1990s many marxist academics proved to be academics first and marxists not at all. Poststructuralism, postmodernism, post-anything that had political relevance. Adding the prefix ‘post’ to anything raised the white flag of surrender and sounded the retreat. Which shows the power of the fetishism of words. The marxism of the university professors proved to be just as much a form of idolatry as the worship of

God through words rather than deeds. The graven images of Marx as the icon of a 'really existing socialism' have long since been pulled down. The astronaut Yuri Gagarin went to visit Marx's tomb in Highgate cemetery when he was in London. It is difficult to work out who of the pair looked the more dumbfounded, Marx's stone-faced bust or Gagarin. The Soviet space programme had nothing to do with Marx, but plenty to do with the idolatry of materialist progress. Marx criticised this as alienation, the investment of objects with existential significance alongside the thingification of the human subjects. And yet there was Marx, worshipped as a stone bust, his ideas fossilized and ignored in their supposed triumph. Philosophy is merely an academic specialism when separated from its roots in real life and activity. Indeed, Marx broke with philosophy precisely on account of its refusal to make contact with practical life. Marx was clear that ideas have to be tested and proved this side of heaven, through social change and through self-change. Changing ideas and changing the world are part of the same process, philosophising is therefore a self-change. As Marx put it in the Theses on Feuerbach: 'the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice'. A philosophical conception of the world is implicit, in however rudimentary and inchoate a form, in the everyday practices and activities of human beings. For Gramsci all human beings are philosophers – or have the potential to be – in that all people possess a rational capacity. This doesn't mean that all people are good philosophers or philosophise well. Much that people say can be shown to be nonsense, illogical, inconsistent, lacking rational and empirical support. Becoming more systematic and disciplined in our thinking means becoming more philosophical. But the basis of such philosophising is the ability to reason and this is a property which belongs to all human beings by virtue of their essential humanity. If there is a responsibility on the part of people to become more systematic in their thinking, so too must philosophers come to engage in the practical questions of the world.

Theodore Adorno explains the relation between theory and practice this way:

If the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that the presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges. The course of the conflict

between the advanced sectors of the class and the individuals who speak-out the truth concerning it, as well as the conflict between the most advanced sectors with their theoreticians and the rest of their class, is to be understood as a process of interactions in which awareness comes to flower along with its liberating but also its aggressive forces which incite while requiring discipline.

Adorno 1972:215

The emancipatory creativity of social praxis therefore requires an organised commitment. This is not philosophy as a theoretico-elitist model in the manner of Plato's philosopher-ruler. Adorno is not arguing for a mediation from above. Neither theory nor politics are autonomous but form a dynamic unity with the real movement of people in society. Thus, philosophy, in unveiling reality and revealing the real relations and contradictions behind falsehoods and fantasies, is also a force within the emancipatory struggles and practices of the revolutionary human subject as it comes to attempt to transform the world. In this manner, theory and practice do indeed form a reality-constituting dynamic unity as opposed to an alienating dualism.

The centrality of praxis as both critical and revolutionary is to be reaffirmed. Philosophising as praxis gives conscious orientation and expression to the creative agency of human subjects, affirming its transformatory significance and holding that in the process of self-development, human beings become knowledgeable agents. Social transformation through creative human agency is also the self-transformation of that agency. The society of practical life, in other words, generates its own philosophers in the process of reclaiming human subjectivity. In this way, theory is derived from the creative, reality changing praxis transforming society, in turn coming to be incorporated into this praxis. As Popper argues, philosophy draws upon problems and issues which arise outside of the philosophical domain. Here, one sees how philosophy becomes worldly. The emancipatory struggles and social practices of human beings in society thus both generates information for philosophical reflection and assimilates philosophical information for conscious orientation. A philosophy that is both theoretical and practical is both distilled from practice and incorporated back into that practice. In this reflexive process based on the dynamic unity of theory and practice, human beings attain that degree of self-consciousness which is the condition of

exchanging a condition of bondage subject to illusion for freedom as self-determination through an awareness of the true nature of reality. Philosophising is the interaction between theory and practice. Apart from this interaction, philosophy does indeed become an ivory tower exercise. The conclusion takes its cue from Vico's 'New Science' and the principle of *verum ipsum factum*, the idea that the truth of something is a condition of having made it. (Pompa 1982). To make the world, to know the world, to realise one's potentialities and exercise one's capacities in the process is precisely Plato's point that virtue is its own reward. We can agree with Aristotle that you are what you repeatedly do, adding the corollary that you should make sure that whatever you do is worth doing in the sense of enlarging and enriching your human powers. People will do something that they enjoy. This is an aspect of Spinoza's joy as the realisation and exercise of natural powers. People will be soon exhausted by philosophy as a sermonising appeal to truth. People need to act. And in acting, they will soon see beyond the manufactured illusions of the common sense world of opinion and come to know the world as their own creation. Philosophy as an *ethos* points to the need to embody and live philosophy as a way of life, as a way of being and living. This is philosophising as the unity of theory and practice – knowledge both informing and being informed by creative human agency. This notion affirms that the changing of circumstances is a self-change on the part of the people. After all, knowing the world and knowing ourselves is a condition of changing the world, coming to see it as a product of our reason, labour and love – Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei*. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' (Marx Thesis XI on Feuerbach)

Contrary to the views of those for whom philosophy is concerned with ensuring that what is said is said with meaning rather than being a discipline with something meaningful to say, issues of language and logic do not exhaust the realm of philosophy. The great traditional questions remain at the heart of philosophy. It is a curious quirk of history that as logical positivism cut philosophy back to the bone of what could be meaningfully said, science, under the influence of quantum mechanics, was showing how truth was anything but simple and discreet. (This criticism applies mainly to Anglophone philosophy). For instance, light can be understood in terms of particles or in terms of wave motions. These are two utterly different and equally valid ways of understanding

the same thing. With logical positivism, philosophy narrowed its vision and sold itself short. Thankfully, those days are over. There is no doubt that philosophy has survived such self-immolation and its continuing relevance is due to the perennial questions of life and how it ought to be lived.

Descartes' famous quote 'I think therefore I am' placed the emphasis on the individual *cogito* to establish the certain basis of truth and knowledge. We can take this further by arguing that as we think, so shall we live. And we do this together. Bertrand Russell said that most people would die rather than think, noting sardonically that that is indeed what most people do – die, die as a result of refusing to think. Death is a consequence of not thinking. That could be physical death, of course, but it also applies to a spiritual death, existing in some dumb, passive state which falls far short of human potentiality. Ideas matter, ignorance is not bliss, and there is a high price to be paid for stupidity. The extent to which we think determines the extent to which our behaviour is guided by ideals, which values we pursue and which we push into the background, which opportunities we see and realise, which we miss. We manage our fears and govern our hopes by ideas, so the quality of these ideas matter. We think, therefore we are. How and what we think determines who we are and how we live. This, ultimately, is the reply to the 'ordinary man of common sense' who urges philosophers to live in 'the real world'. Philosophers show us what this 'real world' really is behind and beyond the world of sense experience and its manifold illusions. And they show us what the real world could be. This is why philosophy is more than an academic exercise but is a way of life. Ideas are not 'up in the clouds' but shape our reality. Whether this is for better or for worse is down to us and our ability to think, our preparedness to think, our courage to think. Philosophy is an integral part of civilization. For Aristotle, the purpose of life is not just to live but to live well, to flourish. Since this is so, it makes sense to think well. To live well, it is necessary to think well. As we think, so shall we live. That, in the end, is both the premise and the promise of philosophy.

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