THE LAWS OF LIFE

An Exploration of Fundamental Problems in Ethics

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THE LAWS OF LIFE

An Exploration of Fundamental Problems in Ethics

Andreas Simonsen

Edited and Translated by Per K. Brask

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THE LAWS OF LIFE:
An Exploration of Fundamental Problems in Ethics

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FOREWORD

Andreas Simonsen (1923–1991) was a Danish-Jewish thinker who published some twenty books in his lifetime, primarily on ethics, many of them explicating paradoxical phenomena in life that require a double view, seemingly contradictory terms necessitating each other.

Niels Bohr devised the term "complementarity" for the wave/particle phenomenon in physics. Simonsen learned a lot about Bohr's investigations from one of his collaborators, Oskar Klein, a cousin of Simonsen's with whom Simonsen lodged while a refugee in Sweden from 1943, when the Germans began rounding up Danish Jews, until his return to Denmark in 1945.

In this book, Simonsen applies Bohr's concept of complementarity to moral situations in life. Simonsen sees complementarity at work when we confront two apparently contradictory ideals, both of which must be fulfilled without compromise, such as when we must be both just and understanding, merciful. Simonsen discerns the inextricable relationship between seemingly mutually exclusive concepts in the realistic understanding of events, causation, and the understanding of the idealistic commandment to love our neighbour, showing that each is necessary for a fuller life.

Andreas Simonsen was not a believer though he reflected a great deal on religion, as he does in this book. His main work was entitled *Humanisme og Kristendom* [Humanism and Christianity]. His wife was reportedly a devout liberal Christian. Simonsen resigned from Copenhagen's synagogue after the war, having declared himself years earlier unable to believe in a personal God. Out of solidarity with his fellow Jews, he waited to resign until after the war.

Simonsen described himself as a “religious humanist,” what we might call a secular humanist, with a deep respect for the accomplishments of science and scholarship as well as a deep respect for and belief in the traditionally religious virtues of awe, humility and gratitude. Again, complementary ideals that by themselves could have disastrous consequences unless held together, a matter he explores in this book. Humanism, he felt, would lead to arrogance toward the world if not tempered by these religious virtues, while religiosity would run the danger of becoming mere fantasy and feeling if not tempered by the realism and rationalism of humanism.

The Laws of Life was originally published in Danish as *Liv og Lov: Tre af etikkens grundproblemer* in 1973. The concerns and issues Simonsen discusses here have not aged in the more than forty intervening years. Of course, the matter of freedom of will versus the necessity of moral law, which Simonsen explicates so sensitively in this book, can never be resolved. But we can come to a greater understanding of it. In this pursuit, Andreas Simonsen’s book is a priceless aid.

Thank you to the Simonsen Foundation for allowing me to translate Simonsen’s work and especially to Marianne Olsen, who chairs the Foundation, for her friendship and advice. Thanks also to Morri Mostow and Doug Long of Fictive Press for their care in publishing this book and for their friendship. Friendship was a central value in Simonsen’s life and work, so it is a pleasure for me to celebrate my friendship with the people mentioned above.

Per K. Brask, Editor and Translator

INTRODUCTION

The first three chapters of this book can be read separately as essays. They concern the three most fundamental problems in ethics. These problems have been pondered throughout history, often with great perspicacity and wit. However, every generation must take its own position on them so that new experiences are included in our understanding of life, not only directly but also indirectly through changing interpretations and practices of past wisdom. Just as wisdom cannot simply be adopted, it cannot simply be dismissed. We must develop our independence in dialogue with the past. Fruitful independence does not consist in starting from scratch.

"Free Will & Determinism" considers the question that begins every engagement with ethics. Do we have any freedom at all to choose one thing over another, such as good over evil? Or, rather, are our actions, without our awareness, peremptorily determined by situations interplaying with genetic disposition and impressions received in life (especially during childhood)?

"Happiness & Duty" considers the ancient, contentious issue of ethics' relation to our quest for happiness. Is it the task of ethics to point the way to happiness? Or, are its edicts so absolute that compliance is our highest goal?

"Humanism & Humility" explores two opposing views of human abilities. One view maintains a self-assured conviction that people are essentially good and that a development toward ethical ideals is possible. The other holds a humble God-given position that devalues human nature as fundamentally sinful, with no capacity for good.

In the last chapter, "The Laws of Life," the three previous chapters are viewed through a single lens. Here, I attempt to untangle the contradictions encountered in the previous chapters by showing that these contradictions are of a special kind. They are inevitable and incontestable because they are attached to everything human and conditioned by a basic paradoxical duality in our essence and existence. We are constituted with both cognition and will.

We are simultaneously realistic and idealistic. Human beings are made both to comply with the laws of nature and to express themselves in life.

Lyngby, March 1973
Andreas Simonsen

CHAPTER 1

FREE WILL & DETERMINISM

A. The theoretical problem

The adage "Where there's a will, there's a way" pithily describes the conviction that you can achieve the impossible if you apply sufficiently strong will. It expresses the assurance that humans have *free will*.

The Danish adage "The stone you cannot lift you must let lie" expresses the opposite thought: Do not believe that by a special effort of will you can solve an assignment that is beyond your abilities. Before you undertake something, you must objectively assess whether you have the necessary abilities and whether conditions support a favourable outcome. In this case, causal connections are emphasized. We are supposed to recognize these connections, to use our common sense, and not put our trust in our will.

Which of these two adages is correct? One possible answer is that there is something true about each of them. The first adage appeals idealistically to will; the second takes a realistic stance, advocating knowledge free of illusion. But could these two contradictory adages be united in a defensible manner? And if so, how? Or, will deeper reflection reveal that one of these two positions on human willing does not hold up?

Throughout history, many philosophers have attempted a solution to this problem, a solution driven by logic. They argue purely for or purely against humans having free will. It is the latter view that is of special interest because it rejects something we instinctively regard as fact.

This philosophy of *determinism* claims that it is an illusion to think that we act from freedom of choice because our entire behaviour is actually determined—definitively conditioned—by present causes (among others, our genetic makeup and past impressions).

Biochemical conditions in the body are seen as the factors that determine our inner life and therefore our behaviour. A biochemistry professor stated in an interview:

> I understand why people have a hard time accepting that the "I" we value so highly is a machine that functions on a chemical basis. It wounds our sense of self. We feel that our thoughts, our personality, our humanity is above anything that could be written out in formulae. Which, of course, we cannot yet do, and perhaps we will never figure out the whole story. I also find the thought disconcerting, but I realize that this must be how things are nonetheless.[1]

Another prominent biochemist spoke about the possibility of a "powerful computer that, at the speed of light, will be able to calculate all the cogs that must be engaged when an infatuation occurs." (To this, he added the reassurance that people will continue to experience infatuation as usual.)[2]

Determinism is also expressed in other ways. Freud, for example, viewed human actions as the necessary result of powerful inborn determinants, our drives, in combination with experience (especially from childhood).

Deterministic theories have had an enormous impact. They have impressed and influenced many who, in blind faith to science, have been convinced that everything, including human behaviour, proceeds from specific causes and, for that reason, we are unable to change behaviour. However, only a few consistently hold this conviction. Most (fortunately) continue to use indeterministic expressions such as, "I ought to have …" or "I must pull myself together …," although, when they realize the inconsistency, they do so with a bad conscience (again, an indeterministic concept).

Indeed, deterministic philosophy has resulted in many important and great thoughts but still it must be regarded as a wrong track. In the end, it is not able to demonstrate that our firmly rooted belief in free will is an illusion.

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[1] Frank Lundquist, *Politiken*, May 29, 1966.

[2] Morten Simonsen, *Politiken*, March 28, 1971.

On one hand, our sense of freedom is so fundamental a factor in us that without it we would not be human. Even a determinist cannot free himself from this. He too feels that he is an "I" and not a robot. On the other hand, the view from which determinism (and all science) proceeds—i.e., that in principle our cognitive faculties deserve our trust—is to a certain extent fundamental and indisputable, though not beyond doubt. What we see could be hallucinations and our cognition could be as false as a dream!

This means that our view of cognition is on an equal footing with our view of choice; it does not hold a privileged, secure position over the latter and cannot therefore declare that our sense of free will is false. Both views are fundamental assumptions in our intellectual-spiritual activities. Hence, it is not possible to get behind them, so to speak, to judge their validity. We have arrived at the wonder that is life.

As a worldview, determinism also presents a weakness in logic. Since Antiquity, people have been alert to logical difficulties in sentences such as "Epimenides of Crete says that all Cretans are liars." Since Epimenides is a Cretan, his statement that all Cretans are liars must be false, which means that Epimenides is trustworthy, but then … The logical mistake is that a statement cannot be used to validate itself. For example, the statement "There's no rule without an exception" cannot be used to test this rule. When we consider the statement "Everything is determined," it turns out to contain an unallowable reference to itself. In the words of Professor Pihl:

> If the claim of universal determinism were to make any sense, this determinism must include humans, their actions and their behaviour in general. Thus, a person maintaining the existence of universal determinism is put in the situation where the very statement of the claim must be seen as a link in the universal chain of events.[3]

Finally, determinism offers a serious *ethical* difficulty. Elementary ethical statements, such as "I ought" and "I should have"—together with

3 Mogens Pihl in *Idehistorisk debat – Determinisme og indeterminisme* [Debates in the History of Ideas – Determinism and Indeterminism], ed. by Ole Bostrup and T. Bülow-Hansen, 1967, p. 69.

concepts like idealism (or obedience to divine commandments) and conscience—rest on the view that we are free to choose. So too does the central ethical concept of responsibility. If we maintain that we lack freedom to determine our actions, it becomes difficult to uphold the notion that we are responsible for them. A number of determinists have in fact rejected all ethics, along with the notion of free will, based on the view that all human actions should only be considered scientifically, and should be mapped and researched by psychologists. Determinists who have retained the idea of ethics have had to grasp at hair-splitting and unconvincing arguments to solve the problem. It is not easy to see a solution. Indeed, these two fundamental ideas seem incompatible.

When applied universally, the deterministic position is not valid. But it contains so much that is correct that the issue of free will cannot be accepted with a simple *yes*. For example, it may be wise to excuse someone's unattractive behaviour with a deterministic argument that the person had to behave this way given his circumstances; i.e., because of his experiences and the influence of external factors.

A discussion of the issue of free will using arguments such as the one above will often be followed up with a contribution to the effect that of course the question cannot be answered with a *yes* or a *no*; the actual answer must be *both and*. But stating that the answer is self-evident without commentary is meaningless. It is necessary to specify when a deterministic or indeterministic approach is valid; a sharp delimitation of the areas where the two approaches are valid is required. Once we recognize that such delimitation is impossible, the seriousness of the issue of free will becomes clear—as does the fact that it is not actually solvable.

Niels Bohr's penetrating thoughts on the problem do not, in fact, aim at a solution but at a clearer understanding of the heart of the problem and its causes by pointing to analogous paradoxes in other fields.

In subatomic physics, Bohr made the strange discovery that certain phenomena cannot be fully described because they are necessarily affected by the observation itself. For example, in one kind of observation, light appears

to be a particle; in another, a wave. These two states cannot be observed at the same time. Thus, two kinds of description are needed that are, in Bohr's word, *complementary*. On one hand; they exclude each another; on the other, they complete each other. This paradoxical situation occurs when an object is sufficiently minute that it cannot be observed as it is in itself, but only as it is in a given observation. In such cases, it is not possible to separate the object from the subject.

In parallel with this condition in physics, Bohr pointed out a psychological one. When we observe people, we also encounter a kind of complementarity because, here too, the "object" is unavoidably affected by the observer. A person is not one and the same regardless of whom they encounter. You cannot be observed without being affected, especially by the other's expectations of you. (It is well known that trust calls forth the best in a person and suspicion, the worst). If an observer tried to avoid having any expectations and completely shut out any possible influence from his own personality by adopting a completely neutral, objective attitude, such "coldness" would make the "object" retreat and close off, making an observation impossible. Observing people requires some subjectivity and openness to complement the objectivity and lack of bias necessary for cognition. Again, we find a paradox, generated by the fact that subject and object form a totality.

Bohr pointed out that the same subject-object issue obtains in the paradox of free will-determinism and will-cognition. Humans are equipped to relate to the world subjectively (willing, acting, creating) and objectively (knowing, abstracting from self and being open to objects and causation). It is not possible to make a sharp distinction between these two functions and situations.

This fundamental duality in our existence is the reason we are unable to posit an unambiguous solution to our view of life. Realizing this, we will be better able to jettison our intuitive wish for a simple formula and understand that in certain situations we must take a willing, *idealistic* position and in others, a reasoned, *realistic* position. In some situations, we must be willing

to *form* ourselves (to *be* our own causes); in others, we must attempt to *understand* (to *find* causes).

Consequently, we must recognize that our view of life is necessarily *both* idealistic and indeterministic and realistic and deterministic—not because of a contradiction due to weakness of thought but rather because it is grounded in the very structure of our existence.

By applying the concept of complementarity to the classical problem of free will, we arrive not at a solution but at a clearer understanding of the issue. We are helped to an understanding of its indissolubility in principle when the paradox is elucidated by analogies in which we recognize the condition of human existence.

B. The practical problem

But how do we manage in a practical way without a solution to this fundamental problem? How do we find a reasonable attitude to human behaviour, our own as well as others', when we have no certainty about either our freedom or lack of freedom?

True, neither an indeterministic nor a deterministic view can claim general validity. Neither has a complete claim on the truth, and each transgresses into the other's area in a manner that cannot be sharply or fully delineated. Therefore, we must do without a general, objective solution.

But even if, in every situation, we must decide subjectively whether it appeals to a (predominantly) free will or to cognition, we do have a criterion to guide us; namely, a practical-moral one.

We must search for truth by aiming for the good. This does not leave us stranded. Deep inside, most of us have a distinct instinctual awareness of whether we should take an indeterministic-idealistic or a deterministic-realistic approach. Whether we choose to follow this awareness is another matter.

For example, we probably do know this deep inside when we justify a character flaw deterministically by saying, "That is just how I am." That is,

we view the flaw as something that couldn't possibly be or become otherwise, due to our supposed genetic inheritance, influences or experiences. Conversely, we act against our better knowledge when, outraged by violent crime, we demand that the criminal be tortured. Such a desire for revenge rests on a misplaced indeterministic view that the criminal could have acted differently and avoided his crime. In this case, deterministic thinking is called for in order to remind ourselves that unfortunate factors can warp the mind, just as a lack of certain vitamins can weaken the body.

The basis for this intuitive recognition of when to reason indeterministically or deterministically is sufficiently solid, despite being unscientific. It is based on the idea of our common humanity—the essence of our two great wisdom traditions, the biblical and the Greek.

This idea of the equality of all humans and the worth of the individual simply as a human being—an idea whose truth cannot be proven, yet is as certain as any scientific knowledge—implies a guiding principle for when to take an indeterministic or a deterministic stance. This idea implies that we should work purposefully on our character to combat primitive egotism and show consideration for others. This assumes a will. It also implies that we should respect our fellows as they are, with all their faults. This requires cognition—recognizing the causes of our faults and that everyone is worm-eaten by selfishness, albeit in various (and slyly camouflaged) ways.

In the poems of Homer, where the basic position is that humans are in the hands of the gods even as regards their feelings and actions, we find many examples of how a deterministic position acquires quite different moral qualities depending on whether the speaker applies it to others or to himself.

Old Priam has good reason to hate Helen because, by letting herself be abducted, she has caused the unfortunate Trojan War. But Priam speaks kindly to her: "I do not blame you—it is the gods whom I blame for this wretched war they have inflicted on me."[4]

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[4] *The Iliad*, Book 3, v. 152-153, translated by Stephen Mitchell, NY: Free Press, 2011, p. 46.

Helen is absolved of guilt. She is not the actual cause of the calamities; her actions are not blameworthy. In this case, a deterministic position bears fruit in reconciliation and gentleness.

Things are different in the speech Agamemnon gives when reconciling with Achilles. Regarding the offence he has caused, Agamemnon says:

> But it really isn't my fault: the blame belongs
> to Zeus and fate and the Fury who walks in darkness.
> They put the savage madness into my mind
> on the day when I seized Achilles' prize for myself.
> What else could I do? At such moments a god takes possession.
> It was Madness, the eldest daughter of Zeus who deceived me.
> She deludes all mortals. Her step is soft, and she doesn't
> walk on the ground but hovers above men's heads,
> damaging them and ensnaring one after another.[5]

Thus, Agamemnon takes no responsibility. The real guilty one is fate or Zeus ("Zeus removed my sanity," he says later) or the Fury or Ate, the goddess who charms and blinds.

This deterministic argument proposed by the guilty one must be seen not only as immoral but also untrue (in the widest elementary terms). It is a deflection. By contrast, Priam's deterministic view that excuses the other person shows perspicacity and wisdom.

In other cases, the opposite may be appropriate, and you may need to apply a deterministic view to yourself. Here too, I will use an example from the Homeric poems, which for good reason held an important place in the education of Greek children as a textbook of human knowledge and wisdom. In the first book of *The Iliad*, when Agamemnon lets fly at Achilles with increasing fury, he momentarily feels the need to recognize Achilles as a great warrior. However, Agamemnon emphasizes in the same breath that Achilles received his abilities from a god, that there is no merit in them.[6] Nowadays, people's abilities are sometimes attributed to nature, in statements such as,

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[5] Ibid., p. 313.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

"There's no reason to admire her for working at top gear from morning to night; it is her nature, after all." But just as this view is undermining (and false) in these cases, it can become just as fruitful (and true) when applied to one's own positive traits.

The decisive factor in whether (and to what extent) we should think in terms of determinism or indeterminism is not only whom it concerns (the person thinking or others), but also the given situation.

Consider these two Danish adages: "As you yell in the woods, so shall you be answered" [i.e., people will respond to you in the manner you behave to them, like an echo in the woods], and "Do not repay with the same coin" [i.e., do not return an insult with an insult]. The paradoxical relationship between these two adages is not dissolvable. But we can decide which one we should use as a guide in any given situation in light of the above-mentioned idea of our common humanity. Both maxims express this notion.

So if we are on the verge of being inconsiderate, we are in need of the wisdom expressed in "As you yell …"; i.e., in principle, everyone has the same claim on our respect and everyone has the same defensive reflexes against offences. From this psychological insight, it is only a small step to the moral insight that we must not allow ourselves to behave in ways we would not accept from others. (This principle of reciprocity is enjoined in several religions as a basic moral precept. As the great Talmudic Rabbi Hillel states, "What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbour."[7] The Sermon on the Mount has a more stringent positive formulation.[8])

When we are offended, we find ourselves in the opposite camp. Then we need the other basic recognition; i.e., that everyone in all ways that matter is created equal and hence feels connected to everyone else in sympathy, somewhat like brothers and sisters, and therefore should counter offence with indulgence and a conciliatory spirit. The adage that we mustn't repay with the

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[7] *Shabbat,* 31a.

[8] The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapter 7.12.

same coin is an appeal to our will; that we must catch ourselves and break the cycle of evil by refusing to act like the one who behaved badly towards us, and instead freely break a potentially perpetual chain of events and restore the common humanity in which we believe.

In this case, we are not dealing with a situation that primarily calls for understanding (of causation) but one that primarily challenges our will (our willingness to break the chain of causation and make a new beginning). The first adage sees a human being as a billiard ball that reacts to force according to definite laws. The second adage views humans as free agents who can choose to respond to evil with goodness. Both views are, in their proper places, correct.

An area where we do not find a relatively clear guide for the unity of an indeterministic and a deterministic view of humanity is in the tension between the ideals of firmness of will and self-knowledge.

It is well known that, in wartime, defeatism based on an objective assessment of the available resources is almost as unacceptable as treason to those who believe that victory is a question of firmness of will. Whenever trust in firmness of will is carried to a point beyond a reasonable regard for facts, perhaps even to the point of purposely ignoring them, this trust becomes dangerous fanaticism. On the other hand, a reasoned assessment of favourable and unfavourable conditions has often led to defeat when not combined with a certain measure of emotionally charged optimism born solely from firmness of will.

It is clear that firmness of will and self-knowledge must be united. But it is not simply about striving for a compromise, by choosing a little of each, where having too much of one means having too little of the other. On the contrary, developing one of the ideals could form the basis for developing the other as well. Developing self-knowledge can become the basis for developing firmness of will. Indeed, firmness of will requires self-knowledge; a will without knowledge of itself and its situation is very ineffective. Without a reasonably realistic view of our will in its relation to the other forces in our minds, especially our drives, these forces will often come into play when

unwanted. Thus, our resolve will likely fail, just as a general who enters a battle without knowing the situation well will likely fail. And repeated defeats lead to loss of self-confidence—resulting in a weakened will. In this way, weakness of self-knowledge easily leads to weakness of will.

Erich Fromm, the well-known German-American psychoanalyst, highlights the importance of the kind of self-knowledge that elucidates the proper time for an effort of will. He warns against a zealous belief in willpower. He is far from being a determinist, but he emphasizes that the will is free only when combined with self-knowledge, not when it is fanatical or without boundaries. Self-knowledge is necessary, not least in understanding when a crucial decision is to be made. For Fromm, general mistrust in free will and ethical capability derives in part from those experiences where we sense a lack of freedom at the end of a decision-making process. But we would have had freedom of choice earlier if we had recognized the moment when choice was still possible.

This personal dilemma between self-knowledge and firmness of will is mirrored in our dealings with others when we try to find the proper attitude to their weaknesses; namely, the dilemma between resignation and trust. Resignation expresses our realization that other people are simply the way they are due to preconditions and, consequently, there is no need to feel regret about a weakness that might have been corrected. Instead, we must learn to include them in our interactions without expectations (or demands) of improvement and thus avoid disappointment. In contrast to this deterministic approach stands trust, which rests on an unshakeable conviction that every human being, despite all causal conditions, has the free will to combat weaknesses. For that reason, we must keep our trust in the people we encounter no matter how often they disappoint us.

Although these two approaches seem to be mutually exclusive, we can see that in practice they can—and must—work together. For example, it is possible to retain trust and expectations yet still be armed against disappointment without irritation if we understand the determining forces that have generated a bad outcome. Why should it be impossible to fruitfully unite

these two attitudes when experience tells us that we succeed easily in uniting them unfavourably? Sometimes we find ourselves saying, “If only he would stop doing …” and at other times, “I’m done with him!”

Nowadays, it is most often the deterministic position that is exaggerated. The school psychologist is right to carefully investigate the causes behind a student’s inability to concentrate. But a deterministic approach goes overboard if the psychologist uses the factors behind the problem to make unconvincing appeals (if any) to the student’s will, instead of demonstrating confidence that the student can activate his own will. (I am naturally discounting serious causes that must claim all one’s attention.)

We often take a misplaced deterministic approach to crime. Some crime commentators insist that we must not condemn the criminal but try to understand him by focusing on root causes. To a great extent, this view is valid and indispensable in so far as it counteracts feelings of contempt, hate and revenge that can destroy morality and justice. That is, in so far as the attitude is taken toward the person who committed the crime. The crime itself can be condemned without our being driven to hate and seek revenge. Condemning the actions rather than the perpetrators of these actions is not merely allowable but necessary—necessary for our ethical health. If we force ourselves to avoid evaluating the actions that contravene our ethical ideals, these ideals will over time become blunted and pale. They cannot but become problematic and relative if we suspend our values and instead look for explanations or justifications for every offence against our ideals.

According to the physician, Ib Ostenfeld:

> Much lack of clarity and confusion is caused by not differentiating between judging an action and judging a person. … Time and again we find that those who theoretically support the high ideals of love of neighbour and not judging others lack significant and strong qualities. They preach an ideal they are unable to put into effect and fall back on its weak caricature: indulgence, lenience and spineless forgiveness. Strength

> is absent. They forget that the ideal allows them to judge actions when confronted with them.[9]

In other words, it is only partly true that we must show sympathy based on the self-knowledge that we ourselves are permeated by moral weakness that, combined with unfavourable factors, could have resulted in bad or terrible outcomes. The other truth is that we must not leave everything to reason's cold logic of cause and effect but must also react with unhesitating passion to good and evil and thus prevent our elementary sense of what is morally right and wrong from being weakened and thrown off course. Wise realism demands warm idealism by its side. Being (the true) and value (the good and the beautiful) are two dimensions of our existence. Our two fundamental approaches, the cognitive and the choosing-willing, mirror these dimensions; they necessarily belong together. Determinism and indeterminism can and must be joined.

C. Noteworthy statements by modern thinkers

In my considerations of the problem of free will (partly as a knowledge issue, partly as a practical-moral issue), I have warned against one-sided determinism because, with its inherent dangers, it characterizes our current culture (though not as much as a generation ago).

In fact, some modern thinkers oppose determinism. The Austrian psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, calls attention to its unsoundness:

> There is a danger inherent in the teaching of man's "nothingness," the teaching that man is nothing but the result of biological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment. Such a view of man makes a neurotic believe what he is prone to believe, namely, that he is the pawn and victim of outer influences or inner circumstances. This neurotic fatalism is fostered and strengthened by a psychotherapy which denies that man is free. … For too long—for half a century in fact—psychiatry tried to interpret the human mind merely as a mechanism, and consequently the therapy of mental disease merely in terms of a technique. … A human being is not a thing among others; *things* determine each other, but *man* is

[9] Ib Ostenfeld, *Udenfor Alfarvej* [Off the Beaten Track], 1963, p. 87.

ultimately self-determining. What he becomes—within the limits of endowment and environment—he has made out of himself.[10]

Against the definitive utterances of one-sided determinism ("We must realize that he is and will always be as he is"), Frankl emphasizes that every person has the freedom to change, and for that reason it is impossible to predict how a person will react. As an example, Frankl recounts how one of the Nazi regime's mass murderers spent his last days in a Russian prison providing comfort and joy to his fellow prisoners and generally proved himself a great comrade to them.

Karl Jaspers, the great German philosopher, stands firmly against the general suspicion of human improvement. He rejects the view that human behaviour is completely determined by instinct (and its attendant passions and feelings) and that reason is unable to curb our aggression and make us more humane. Karl Jaspers holds that our human essence is not merely a blind play of biological forces but is distinguished by being able to achieve an overview, a rationality that can be imbued with passion and creativity. "Reason appears as the outline of man's life, as we hope he will be and in so far as it lies within our power to create him."[11]

To the objection that reason is only an unrealistic dream, Jaspers replies:

> I agree, [it does] not exist as the object of an ascertaining intelligence but only as the content of a decision.
>
> This decision can give reality to such facts as are in their origins inaccessible to all causal knowledge. … If I say that all this is a figment of the imagination it means that I do not want it to be a reality. Reason does not, however, depend on my knowledge of it but on my putting it into practice.[12]

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[10] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, NY: Washington Square Press, 1985, pp. 153-157.

[11] Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Anti-Reason in Our Time*, Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971, p. 64.

[12] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

According to Jaspers, reason must not limit itself to being intellectual, analyzing, causal; in all important questions it must draw on the whole personality, including passions, will and beliefs.

In scientific circles where one might expect people to have a deterministic worldview, voices have been raised in the last fifty years against one-sided views of existence. Above, I mentioned Bohr's philosophy of complementarity. The following are general reflections by the French-American biologist René Dubos, from his book, *So Human an Animal.* He stresses that value-choice-will constitutes an area of reality that stands in a problematic tension to scientific knowledge:

> Scientific knowledge *per se* cannot define or impose values to govern behavior, but it provides facts on the basis of which choices can be made.
>
> While choice can be made more rational by basing it on factual information, and on evaluation of consequences, it always retains a personal component because it must ultimately involve a value judgment. This constitutes another expression of the determinism-freedom polarity, which is one of the most characteristic aspects of the human condition.[13]

Dubos ends the foreword to his book with "Man makes himself through enlightened choices that enhance his humanness."[14]

In conclusion, I will cite a few exceptionally clear and powerful statements by an important Danish humanist, Peter P. Rohde:

> Science cannot see freedom, so if a scientist claims that freedom does not exist he has gone beyond his competence, the competence given him as a scientist, because one cannot arrive at qualitative categories by methods fitted for quantitative concerns. … We may then postulate freedom as a possibility for a human self, or whatever word one wants to apply to what, in an old-fashioned word, is called the soul. We can never prove its existence. Freedom is not something that can be proven; it is something experienced. … In order to prevent misunderstandings I hasten to add that I haven't made a case for having a self that stands apart from causation. … The case I am making is that a self must also be viewed under the category of freedom and must be viewed as a synthesis of freedom and necessity.

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13 René Dubos, *So Human an Animal*, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968, p. 131.

14 Ibid., p. xii.

> Without the notion of freedom, a human being is an animal, and without the concept of necessity [causation], a god; but in the end we are actually talking about human beings.[15]

15 Peter P. Rohde, *Både – og* [Both – And], 1972, p. 149.

CHAPTER 2

HAPPINESS & DUTY

The relationship between happiness and duty is one of the fundamental questions in ethics, one that has been debated with much passion since the days of Socrates. It is one of the great contentious issues that divide worldviews.

Happiness (or eudaemonia) ethics claims that achieving the highest degree of happiness is our natural pursuit and proper goal. It is the goal that should guide our behaviour. The concept of duty is rejected as false, as an errant idea. Morality is seen as secondary, valid only in so far as it promotes happiness. In the following, I will use the term “happiness ethics” to refer to those approaches to life that make happiness the ultimate value.

Duty-based (or deontological) ethics maintains that duty—the notion that “you must”—is the highest absolute authority on how people should behave. Commitment to duty is seen as contrary to our pursuit of happiness. I will use the term “duty ethics” to refer to ethics of this kind.

A. Happiness ethics

An overview of some of its main forms:

1. *Power ethics*. I use the word “ethics” in its widest sense to refer to teachings about the proper way to live. *Power ethics* is the teaching that promotes unencumbered egoism and the right of the strongest. This form of happiness ethics is the furthest “to the left.” It is completely contrary to duty ethics since morality is generally seen as an unnatural invention. It is only natural and proper that every person strive for complete fulfillment of his desires. We do not owe anything to our fellows; they are viewed partly as rivals, partly as a means to an end. Max Stirner, a 19th century German promoter of power ethics, expresses it thus:

> I *utilize* the world and men! … I can love, love with a full heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved one for anything else than *nourishment* of my passion, on which it ever refreshes itself anew.[16]

2. *Freudian naturalism.* "Freudian" refers to Freudians generally and not necessarily to Freud himself. This is one of the many widely accepted worldviews that developed under Freud's influence and has been defended in his name.

This form of naturalism distinguishes itself from power ethics by recognizing moral norms as necessary for social life and peaceful relations between individuals. It even acknowledges altruism as a surplus phenomenon, a sort of superstructure to elementary egoism. Once fundamental needs have been met, additional satisfaction can be found in pleasing and helping others.

But the main point of this view is the conflict between nature and morality. Our drives—not least those suppressed from consciousness, which we may become aware of through dream interpretation—are seen as our essential, natural "I," which becomes weakened and warped by moral directives. Moral directives repress us, produce conflict and feelings of guilt that lead to psychosomatic illnesses, neuroses, and harm our health in other ways. Pain (such as headaches), physiological disturbances (such as impotence) and illnesses (such as ulcers) are explained as the natural consequence of the war waged by our conscience against our sex drive and aggression.

3. *Theonomous happiness ethics.* An ethics is termed "theonomous" when its concept of the good is based on the recognition of divine will. The good is what God or the gods have commanded.

While theonomous *duty* ethics refers exclusively to God's will, not only to what is good but also why we should choose it (because God commands it), theonomous *happiness* ethics answers the question of why we should choose it by holding that ethical living, obedience to God, is the path to

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[16] Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, NY: Libertarian Book Club, 1963, pp. 295-296.

happiness. If we let ourselves be guided by the will of God, we obtain his favour, a relatively propitious fate and salvation in the hereafter (faith in reward or punishment in the afterlife is often part of theonomous ethics). If we disobey God, we will be punished both here and in the hereafter.

Worldviews based on this idea, often camouflaged or modified, played a significant role in earlier times, including in Christianity (for example, in Pietism). Although less common today, it is still at work in our culture.

4. ***Erich Fromm's work*** will serve as the representative form of happiness ethics that is closest to duty ethics.

Erich Fromm defends his ethics of neighbourly love from the standpoint of happiness ethics by showing that love of neighbour is the healthiest way of life. But he views ethics as encompassing the highest happiness, not merely as a means to happiness. He parts ways with theonomous happiness ethics and with autonomous[17] ethics, which anchors the good in usefulness; i.e., in the service of obtaining a good name or good relations ("As you yell in the woods …"). Fromm cannot accept the good as part of a calculated attitude. As opposed to the idea of righteousness and friendliness based on an idea of reciprocity, he finds the ethical nerve in a spontaneously emotional attitude to life, a love exemplified by self-forgetting devotion.

He argues that the ability and drive for "productive love"—characterized by caring, responsibility, respect and understanding—is a foundational aspect of human nature that exists in everyone. Fromm distances himself from the Freudian view of the sex drive and aggression as fundamental drives. For Fromm, human sexuality gets its full expression as a component of a larger context: productive love. Drives of aggression are secondary to the drive for productive love, not only in cases of "reactive violence" (violence in defence of primary values), but also when they result from destructive tendencies. This "necrophilia" (love of death) is not an innate drive but results from the

[17] An ethics is autonomous when it is not anchored in anything beyond the human.

perversion of our primary productive drive, which, in the absence of natural satisfaction, develops into a sickly surrogate.

Fromm's main idea is that productive love, the full expression of our nature, leads to happiness. As opposed to Freudian naturalism's war between morality and nature, Fromm is convinced of a deep congruency between the good and the healthy, between ethics and mental hygiene.

(Such views have been proposed before in the history of moral philosophy by thinkers such as Spinoza, to whom Fromm is indebted).

Objections to specific positions

(Except to Fromm's view, to which I have no objections apart from those I make against happiness ethics in general).

1. *Power ethics* is easily challenged because it is a distorted form of happiness ethics and naturalism. The personal basis upon which "happiness" and "nature" is understood in power ethics is corrupt. It lacks a fundamental sense of the value of others. This position does not recognize natural fellow feeling, or only in a truncated form. Its concept of friendship is purely egotistical-opportunistic.

2. *Freudian naturalists* arrive at an important insight when they attribute many illnesses to the collision between natural impulses and moral directives. Much harm is done by authoritarian and distorted morality, especially sexual restrictions and excessive demands of self-denial (to be always the one who yields, who makes sacrifices, etc.). However, I maintain that a wholehearted natural morality—arising from personal conviction and respect for human biology—will normally not become harmful. In the few aggravated situations where it might cause some harm, the alternative would be the greater evil. I refer to Fromm's critique as described above, which I consider apt.

3. My objection to ***theonomous happiness ethics*** is that doing good loses its ethical character when done in expectation of a reward (or to avoid punishment). The novelist Henrik Pontoppidan makes an important point when he has his character Lykke-Per [Lucky Per] write in his diary:

> Voltaire supposedly said that if God did not exist we would have to invent him. I find more truth in the statement if we turn it around. If there really were a God, we would have to forget him, not because we fear punishment but to cultivate people who will do good for its own sake. How is it possible to give alms to a poor man if you believe, and you have an interest in believing, that God in heaven keeps accounts and nods approvingly at what he sees?[18]

General objections

The weakness in the worldviews of happiness ethics is their failure to appreciate the idea of morality as a primary factor in our nature. Morality's unconditional, primary character is undervalued in the fourth view (represented by Fromm), while the other three misjudge its naturalness as contrary to our nature.

My central objection to happiness ethics is this. When morality is challenged as unnatural (as in the first and second views) or is relativized (as in the third and fourth views, which legitimize it as an aid to happiness), it is not recognized as the specific peculiarity that it is. The truth is that morality is an absolute trait of our humanity. I will try to support this claim.

Firstly, I would like to draw attention to the remarkable fact that the moral nihilism of power ethics has never been rationally refuted in a satisfying way—despite many valiant attempts beginning with Plato's *Gorgias*—because it is not possible to do so. The validity of the idea of morality is not provable. This is true not only for the idea of love of neighbour but also for the idea of justice. If a man were so powerful that he could get away with heedlessly satisfying every desire, how could you possibly convince him to self-impose the kind of restrictions demanded by the idea of justice?

Professor Grue-Jørgensen explains that:

> A sense of duty is as much part of human existence as the experience of time and space. … "Ought" is an original form in our consciousness as is "to be able," "to feel like," "willing," to understand and to have insight. To

[18] Henrik Pontoppidan, *Lykke-Per* [Lucky Per], 13th printing, 1968, vol. 2, p. 301.

> experience the moral rightness of an action is as primitive as the experience of the logical correctness of an explanation.[19]

Albert Einstein speaks of:

> The sublimity of those transpersonal objects and goals that cannot be, or do not need to be, grounded rationally. They exist with the same necessity and self-evidence as the person himself. … Science can only confirm what is but never what ought to be.[20]

Even though the idea of morality cannot be proven as an absolute and natural phenomenon, a number of circumstances point us in that direction.

We value the person who is effortlessly kind, helpful and selfless much more highly than the person whose behaviour is similar but calculated and effortful. Instinctively, we assume that true morality is spontaneous.

Indeed, people who spontaneously act out of love of neighbour can sometimes put themselves at risk; for example, someone who jumps in at great personal risk to save a child from an oncoming train. The rescuer's ethical impulse is primary and absolute.

Another example was Denmark's firm refusal of Nazi demands for special laws regarding its Jewish citizens. This was the tipping point for Denmark, when the politics of negotiation could have faltered—risking the kind of incalculable suffering that occurred in Norway. (The fact that the Nazis never actually made such demands was due to this firmness; the German leaders in Denmark, Renthe-Fink and Best, were very aware of the Danes' position.) This heroic stance by the Danes implied a rejection of the position of happiness ethics, which would have required weighing one kind of suffering against another and prevented four million people from putting themselves at risk of dire suffering for the security of seven thousand.

In some cases, heroism may be subsumed under an ethics of happiness view; namely, when someone who risks his life for another explains that life

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[19] K. Grue-Sørensen, *Vor Tid Moralskepticisme* [Moral Scepticism in Our time], 1937, p. 113.

[20] Albert Einstein, *Perspektiver og Udsyn* [Perspectives and Views], 1967, p. 48.

would not be worth living without having taken the risk. But when we regard a guilty conscience caused by a failure to act as worse than death, there is an implication that the ethical is understood as absolute. In such a case, we would probably not even consider seeking relief from our bad conscience (through psychotherapy, memory suppression or brain washing).

No, consideration for our fellow man is rooted in our nature, even if it is often obstructed by our egoism. Nonetheless, fellow feeling, like egoism, is an elementary force.

There is a connection between morality and happiness. The highest form of fellow feeling is the maximal expression of our being and therefore our greatest happiness. Happiness is a gift so it cannot be our aim. If it were our aim, we wouldn't be talking about the highest form of fellow feeling. Fellow feeling is fundamental and it cannot be realized by pursuing something else.

Kierkegaard says:

> We can rely on the good to produce benefits but if "benefit-hungry" humans for that reason wanted to do good, would they ever manage it? … No, the soul must decide to abhor all calculation, all cleverness and prospects. It must want the good because it is good. Then the soul will sense that there are benefits but it must stick to its duty because it is its duty and it will find peace of mind by doing so.[21]

Viktor Frankl states:

> What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is only possible as a side-effect of self-transcendence.[22]

B. Duty ethics

An overview of some of its main forms:

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[21] Søren Kierkegaard, *Atten opbyggelige taler* [Eighteen Edifying Speeches], (ed.) H.O. Lange, 1940, p. 393.

[22] Frankl, op. cit., p. 133.

1. ***Ethics of suffering*** is an ethics whose primary goal is to overcome our nature, our tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain. It can be practiced partly by exposure to pain, partly by denying pleasure. This form of ethics is furthest "to the right" and is completely antagonistic to happiness ethics.

Ethics of suffering takes two main forms. One is founded on a sharply dualistic view of the relationship between God and humanity. People are seen as thoroughly sinful and our nature must be broken as much as possible. In fact, the religious reason for renunciation (and possibly self-flagellation) is often to obtain bliss in the afterlife. Thus, it is really a form of happiness ethics. But Calvin's teachings show that this isn't necessarily the case. His teachings command strict asceticism, but he simultaneously maintains that this does not lead to a better lot after death because God has decided our lot before our birth.

The other main form of ethics of suffering results from the strong dualism in its view of the relationship between body and soul. The soul is seen as good and the body as evil. The main function of the soul is to combat the body, to liberate its feelings of pleasure and pain. Again, asceticism is practiced without benefits in the afterlife (like Diogenes in the barrel).

Ethics of suffering is often present as a subtext in conventional morality whenever we imagine that morality consists in doing something we don't want to do and avoiding what we do want to do.

2. ***Kierkegaard*** defines the ethical as an imitation of Christ, consisting of a love of neighbour to the point of suffering because our fellows misinterpret our love for them, leading them to deride and persecute us.

Kierkegaard distances himself from an ethics of suffering in so far as the ethical for him is viewed as an attitude towards fellow humans, of love and self-denial, but not just as attitude. After all, Kierkegaard deems that a love of neighbour that hurts is like a martyrdom (and is therefore an imitation of Christ). This is where his stance comes close to an ethics of suffering.

3. ***Kant*** claims that morality consists in obedience to the "categorical imperative"; i.e., to an absolute "you shall." For Kant, common morality is

only morality if it comes from unconditional obedience to the imperative and not from any other motive (for example, from doing someone a favour for pleasure). It is not sufficient that the act be congruent with the demand of duty. Its motive must be a feeling of duty. This is pure duty ethics.

When Kant claims that ethics is contrary to our natural tendencies, it begins to look like an ethics of suffering. But it isn't. Kant does not view suffering as a value, merely as an unavoidable consequence of a life properly lived; i.e., the kind of life that is determined by—and this is his primary value—the idea of the worth of every human and the equality of all. The categorical imperative instructs us to act in such a way that the principle governing our action can be made into a rule for everyone.

On the other hand, Kant's teaching contains a claim that could be seen as a turn toward happiness ethics—his claim of the existence of a just God and an afterlife where virtue is rewarded. However, it is critical for him that we not have this reward in mind at all; otherwise, we would not act in a way Kant would consider virtuous.

4. ***Stoicism*** defines the good as a way of life that is in concert with nature. That is, we subsume ourselves to the laws of nature. Humankind is seen as a grand organism, which leads us to respect our fellows, partly for reasons of justice, partly with a "stoic calm" toward those factors in life beyond our control.

For Stoics, this attitude is not only a duty. It also implies the greatest expression of our essence, our greatest happiness. Thus, Stoicism represents a form of duty ethics that is closest to happiness ethics. Their similarity is significant. Both views claim a unity of morality and happiness. Their difference consists in the fact that, for the Stoics, the primary issue—what they sought—was not human happiness but an understanding of our purpose, our task. On this point they found themselves in continual disagreement with the Epicureans, who advocated (a highly developed) happiness ethics.

Objections to specific positions

(Except to the last-mentioned view to which I have no objections apart from those I make against duty ethics generally).

1. Regarding ***ethics of suffering****,* we can say something similar to what was said about power ethics. It can be challenged as being a distorted form of duty ethics. But while power ethics' deformed understanding of happiness is based on a defect of feeling, ethics of suffering is based (at least partly) on an error in thinking. It mistakenly generalizes the occasions when we inadvertently offend or harm others, occasions when morality demands a good deal of self-negation. In ethics of suffering, this self-negation is considered the essence of morality, yet it completely ignores the fact that our relationship with others must be part of any definition of morality.

The Norwegian writer, Sigurd Hoel, pointedly challenges the negative attitude to life underlying an ethics of suffering:

> The old men lift trembling index fingers and say, Sin and more sin! Whatever your body or soul wants is sin! Remember that you are wicked and what you want is wretched! So you must control yourself. Look at me! I control myself. Difficult, you say? Impossible, you say? Of course it isn't. You only have to control yourself for twenty, thirty years, until you are fifty or sixty years old, then everything gets easier and finally you will be fully in control, you get closer to completion, which you will reach once you're in your grave. The aim of life is death.[23]

2. Some of the critiques directed at ethics of suffering also apply to ***Kierkegaard*** in so far as his principled love of neighbour is combined with an ethics of suffering. But my claim that such an attitude is caused by an error in thinking requires comment when aimed at one of the sharpest thinkers who ever lived. It must be stated that, in his case, it is caused by the kind of error in thinking that is not due to a weakness of thought but to external factors—preconceived attitudes formed in childhood and a psychological peculiarity.

3. ***Kant*** was already challenged by his contemporaries for his claim that morality is fundamentally contrary to our natural tendencies and therefore

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[23] Sigurd Hoel, *Møte ved milepelen* [Meeting at the Milestone], 1947.

must require some self-negation. Schiller rightfully satirized this position in his famous couplet: “Well do I want to serve my friends, unfortunately I do it out of affection/ and so it rankles me that I am not more virtuous.”[24]

Another weakness is that Kant—because the supposed conflict between duty and pleasure is unbearable—finds it necessary to advance the claim of reward in the afterlife. The Stoics arrived at a deeper understanding of the ethical when they recognized that it was included in happiness proper and hence did not need the support of a hereafter.

General objections

What is generally objectionable in the positions of duty ethics is, first of all, their attitude toward our natural pursuit of happiness. They view this pursuit as wickedness, the very thing against which morality should be defined. Or, they see happiness as something we must disregard when considering the ethical. (The Stoics, too, refused to determine the good on the basis of our drives toward pleasure and happiness. Their concept of “in accordance with nature” does not refer to human nature and our innate desire for happiness but to the laws of the cosmos).

In its strong form, this negative attitude toward our natural striving for happiness demands asceticism, as well as self-negating altruism and boundless sacrifice to others. These two stances cause much harm and lead to pretense.

Unavoidably, asceticism and fanatical altruism are drains on mood and energy—directly, by their negation of natural life; and indirectly, through regret, feelings of sinfulness and self-contempt, which inevitably follow from frequent defeat. In extreme cases, they can cause harm to a person’s health, especially in the form of neuroses, a fact to which Freud, to his merit, brought attention. The ironical consequence of a morality that makes foolish and

[24] Schiller, *Xenien aus dem Musenalmanach*, 1797.

overwrought demands is that we become so exhausted that we have less energy to be of use or to give joy to our fellows.

In addition, ethical demands of such an unnatural kind must to a remarkable degree give rise to evasion; for example, with the excuse that theory is one thing, practice, another.

Professor Grue-Sørensen talks about those "dreamers who have chosen so high an ideal that they never risk having to live by it, because the ideal bears no relation to actual life."[25]

Suppressed nature will demand its due in uncontrolled ways. Extremely loving people may suddenly, without a perceptible reason, turn meanly aggressive. Often, people subscribing to duty ethics find substitutes for the pleasures foregone, such as feeling smug or proud when comparing their moral standards with those of others or enjoying being a martyr.

Secondly, we must object to duty ethics because of its formalistic character. It disregards what would naturally give life meaning because it ignores whether its attitude results in any joy. In so far as we are equipped with a palate that can appreciate good food, with eyes that can enjoy colours and shapes, and with ears that can delight in tones and rhythms; these pleasures must be part of our concept of life. The proper way to live must include striving to enjoy these. Why should we—as Kant advised—strive only for *eigne Vollkommenheit* [personal perfection] and *fremde Glückseligkeit* [happiness for strangers]? Why not also for *eigene Glückseligkeit* [personal happiness]?

The proper attitude to life must be verified not only formally, as a true relationship to our fellows, but also meaningfully, in terms of appropriate self-realization. We must see life not only as submission but also as expression. An ethics built solely on duty addresses only the framework and rules to

[25] K. Grue-Sørensen, op. cit., p. 104.

which life must fit and adjust, but does not address life itself. It speaks to rules, not to life.

People who are always concerned with duty become brittle. They lose all animated spontaneity. How too much sensitivity to others can destroy spontaneity can be detected in the kind of conversation where both parties strive to bring up subjects of special interest to the other, or where they attempt to avoid subjects that might cause the other party discomfort. Such conversations often become lifeless and joyless, to the benefit of neither party. Whereas it can be very stimulating and charming when a person blasts ahead with something that preoccupies him, prompted by an "egotistical" impulse to recount an experience or discuss a problem. That will often inspire the other person to spontaneous expression as well. They will connect and establish a true and beneficial engagement as the people they are, not because of some overwrought sense of submission to rules.

The abstract formalism of duty ethics, its strange hollowness, can be observed when it slows down the circulation of the good. It focuses one-sidedly on the duty to perform good deeds, while ignoring the art of receiving good deeds wholeheartedly. Instead, being the recipient of good deeds produces feelings of humility or indebtedness. The person subscribing to duty ethics would rather be a little god who always does what's good than a human being who sometimes helps and sometimes needs help.

The German philosopher, Leonard Nelson, illustrates how this attitude is destructive to the natural circulation of the good:

> There is a story about a monk, Makarius, who lived with his order of brothers in the desert where they were in danger of being overcome by thirst. A distant friend sends him a grape. As a proper altruist, Makarius gives it to someone else, who gives it to someone else again, and so on, until it returns to him. Betraying his ideals, he eats it. As an altruist, he should have started a new round until the grape dried out and became inedible.[26]

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[26] Quoted in Grue-Sørensen, op. cit., p. 103.

Neighbourly love would become impossible if everyone always submitted to strict duty ethics. Even if, realistically speaking, there will always be many who are not of a duty ethics persuasion and who would be on the receiving end of good deeds, there is something unbecoming and humiliating in accepting goodness from people who don't see themselves as equal, but who help, as it were, from above.

Finally, in its extreme form, duty ethics contains a weakness in its theory of knowledge. When an ethics is not only not derived from our striving for happiness but does not even attempt congruity with happiness, we are faced with a view that holds ethics as something that exists *a priori*, before any reason. Reasoned knowledge is given no access to the holy of holies. It is considered completely irrelevant that a proper attitude to life must address the fact that by nature we are designed to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Discrediting reason carries with it the unfortunate consequence that it opens the gates to any definition of the ethical.

The issue becomes clear in cases where the *a priori* foundation of an ethics is divine will. For example, when Duns Scotus rejects Thomas Aquinas' "*Deus vult, quia bonum est*" [God *wants* what is good] with the opposite claim, "*Bonum est, quia Deus vult*" [The good is good because God wants it]. Duns Scotus' variation implies that God could have determined that evil is good and that we therefore would have to build an ethics on this. If this were so, then Abraham acted correctly beyond any doubt when he obeyed the Lord and raised his knife against his son. And it would be sacrilege to claim that Abraham should have refused, convinced that evil could never be good.

The monstrous idea that the good could mean anything is a problem for any theonomous ethics, not only theonomous duty ethics. I draw attention to it here because in the case of theonomous happiness ethics, it is not the theonomy that is its main interest but the imagined reward or punishment in the hereafter. In theonomous duty ethics, on the other hand, the theonomy solves the problem of foundation that is of concern in every duty ethics (in so far as it shuns our drive for happiness).

Autonomous duty ethics finds its *a priori* basis in a non-religious dogma or postulate, or in an intuition. Assuming that the renunciation of our drive for happiness is consistent, here too enumerable definitions of the good become possible.

It is, of course, not by accident that most of the worldviews of duty ethics define the good as righteousness and love, and not as dishonesty and violence, etc. But that definition has come about by making a break in the foundation of duty ethics. Unconsciously, followers of duty ethics have been guided part way by human nature, by the fact that we seek happiness. When theonomous ethics enjoins against injustice and commands love of neighbour in the name of divine will, it actually obtains its knowledge of divine will from common human experience and thinking. That is one reason why the ethics of different religions are in general agreement.

But there are examples of duty ethics that maintain other definitions, such as blind obedience to the State and unconditional surrender to it of life and happiness—and independent thinking—for the good of country. Or, when during religious wars, conquering "heretics" by any available means is justified by the holiness of the goal. Such worldviews are clear evidence of the possible consequences of an ethics established without regard to facts.

In my objections to happiness ethics, I brought up the point that the ethical in that case was distinguished by being unconditional and therefore not founded in reality. But at the same time, I emphasized that it is rooted in our nature, in our elementary feeling of values. Happiness ethics does not claim that ethics should be established by excluding reason. There is no contradiction between feelings of what is valuable and reason; there is an interaction between subconscious, intuitive knowledge and conscious, discursive thinking. This claim of an unbreakable interdependence between vision and reason, between morality and the quest for happiness, implies a rejection of both happiness ethics and duty ethics. Below, I will discuss the ethics that I endorse.

C. Complementary ethics

Between happiness ethics and duty ethics lies a third option, *complementary ethics*, which claims that there is a complementary relationship between the quest for happiness and submission to duty.

On one hand, complementary ethics sees the concept of duty in a way that connects with our nature; the quest for happiness and submission to duty must not be viewed as two sharply separate principles.

On the other hand, it recognizes a form of duality in so far as the concept of duty cannot be derived from our nature by reason alone. It must be partially accepted as being unconditioned.

This seems to be a contradiction because complementary ethics is claiming both a monistic view and a dualistic view of the relationship between the quest for happiness and submission to duty. We are familiar with these two contrary claims in our daily lives. We sometimes value as honest the goodness that comes naturally and sometimes devalue it because we assume that essential morality must be based on a struggle to overcome our natural impulses.

But on closer investigation, this is not a contradiction based on weak logic. The two claims belong inextricably together despite their seeming irreconcilability. If we give up one of them, we will end up with more than a one-sided position; it will lead us to a distorted view of what we are talking about. The indisputable component of the contradiction is not a mistake in the claim, but a peculiarity in what we are investigating. The relationship between morality and nature contains a contradiction that it is, in principle, impossible to remove.

Schiller recognized this in his philosophical writings, where he characterizes the ethical both as "*Anmut*" [grace], which designates a charming ethos that is natural and realizes itself as a matter of course and with

playful ease; and as "*Würde*" [dignity], greatness of soul, a grand, possibly heroic effort of will to overcome nature.[27]

Such a paradoxical relationship—between contraries that are nonetheless so tightly intertwined that only together are they meaningful and complete—we can call *complementary*.

The complementarity between striving for happiness and submitting to duty, between nature and morality, expresses a fundamental peculiarity of human nature. After all, *Homo sapiens* is both an animal driven by instinct and a spiritual being who, to a certain extent, can give form to his life by thought and will. The two principles at work in our being, nature and spirit, belong together and are equals, like form and content. If we are to realize ourselves fully, this interdependence between matter and form must be as intimately connected as they are in an inspiring poem, where form does not impoverish the content. Instead, its form is an incitement that makes the poem richer and deeper, while, conversely, its content inspires a distinct form.

Our attitude to life must be a combination of realism—knowledge and recognition of given materials—and idealism, a shaping will. Daily life shows us that such a combination is possible, that nature and spirit are not separate realities—no more than are body and soul. At times, a person is able, by an effort of will, to do something that a realistic evaluation would deem impossible. In the same way, many people wither away because their will is not sufficiently engaged by demanding tasks and duties. Our will is often engaged by external factors; but it may also be engaged by inner factors, such as exciting interests and powerful ideals.

Looked at more closely, pure realism turns out to be unrealistic when we distinguish sharply between our nature and our ideals. Idealism is part of our being, a factor that cannot be distilled, just as it is impossible to get a proper conception of the body's construction and functions by excluding our psychology. Human nature is not an independent quantity. It is always

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[27] Schiller, "Über Anmut und Würde," 1793.

interdependent with our will. As Schiller says, “The human being is the being who wills.”[28]

I need not argue the point that one-sided idealism is just as mistaken as one-sided realism. Ideality separated from nature is like form separated from content: it makes no sense.

Healthy, true humanity must be a unity of nature and spirit. The paradox that our attitude toward life must be at once realistic and idealistic is a practical consequence of the great philosophical problem concerning the relationship between body and soul; or, put differently, the fact that the question of free will is, in principle, unanswerable. Philosophy has not been able and will never be able to determine whether we are primarily physical-chemical or psychological-spiritual, whether our behaviour is determined by given causes or by free will. Our thinking comes up against a fundamental complementarity, an irresolvable paradox. We come up against the wonder that is life.

Complementary ethics in Socrates

In the dialogues of Socrates, the emphasis is on happiness ethics. His basic position is that injustice is to the soul what sickness is to the body; that an ethical life is simply the healthy expression of the soul and therefore of human happiness. Just as we strive for happiness, we must strive for goodness. Though often we do not actually behave ethically, we cannot be deficient on purpose. We behave unethically because we have insufficient understanding of what it means to be ethical. This is the meaning of two of Socrates’ central claims, which are often cited as “virtue is knowledge” (or better yet, insight or understanding) and “no one fails voluntarily” (i.e., no one acts unjustly on purpose).

[28] Schiller, “Über das Erhabene” [On the Sublime], 1801.

If Socrates held only this view, we would have to categorize him as a eudaemonist, and he would be the oldest spokesperson for my fourth form of happiness ethics.

But Socrates' view of life includes another idea. Albeit expressed less frequently in his dialogues, it comes to the fore in the *Apology*. Several times, he characterizes the ethical as obedience to God—or to the gods. (He uses singular and plural forms interchangeably.) This obedience is to something divine inside us, an ethical insight implanted deep down by God. He is not talking about blind obedience to specific divinely revealed moral commandments. His ethics is autonomous; it is not anchored in dogma. The religious use of the term "obedience" nonetheless means that he accentuates the ethical as an unconditioned authority. Thus, we encounter duty ethics as a complement to his happiness ethics.

It may be for pedagogical reasons that this notion has a modest place in the dialogues compared to his arguments for happiness ethics. Since Socrates wanted to convince people who did not welcome deep reflection on general ethical questions but were occupied with daily living and the pursuit of money and position, he naturally had to make happiness ethics his point of departure. But even here, a view of duty ethics shows up. For example, at the end of the dialogue, *Hippias Minor*, in which Socrates recognizes that he sometimes finds it necessary to accept the possibility of acting unjustly on purpose. His claim that this is impossible because the ethical is identical with happiness is not meant as a doctrine but as a pronounced and inciting expression of a fruitful view that demands its opposite as complement. This is a dualistic view. There is a conflict between our morality and our natural impulses; for that reason, the choice between right and wrong is a matter of will, not only of knowledge.

Socrates not only expressed his duty ethics in words but also in action. He went to his death for his work and his ideas—he could have avoided a martyr's death if he had taken a less unyielding and challenging position in the court—because he felt confronted by an unconditional imperative. He felt he was facing a divine command.

That he simultaneously felt that obedience to God and self-sacrifice was the highest form of self-expression and happiness does not mean that his behaviour was based on happiness ethics. His action was an expression of the paradoxical relationship between compliance with duty and the quest for happiness, at once discrepancy and harmony.

The fact that the core of Socrates' view of life was paradoxical has naturally led to much misunderstanding. Two of his followers founded schools with completely different teachings. Aristippus saw Socrates one-sidedly as a philosopher of happiness ethics, whereas Antisthenes saw him as a philosopher of duty ethics. Later, both the Epicureans and the Stoics referred to him as their master teacher. More recently, Socrates has generally been regarded as the great pioneer of happiness ethics.

If we attend closely to this unique Greek wise man, we will find both thoughts, despite their contradiction, and not a philosophical system. (That Socrates had no system to teach may be why he never wrote anything down himself). We are faced with a paradox. We must accept this, even if we find it disappointing.

If we look more closely, we will undoubtedly discover that this paradoxical, complementary trait is not a weakness of Socrates but a foundational peculiarity of our existence.

CHAPTER 3

HUMANISM & HUMILITY

I take “humanism” to mean complete trust in human ability, both ethical and scientific. By “humility,” I mean the opposite attitude, one that is based on the conviction that humans are capable of nothing on their own and are completely dependent on an external force. Whether this power is called God (as is most common), a personal God, or whether a non-believer uses the term abstractly, does not matter. The contrary attitude to humanism is not belief in God but our feeling of dependency on a powerful external authority, regardless of how we conceive of it or what we call it.

A. One-sided humanism

Concerning ethics

Stoicism was the first comprehensive expression of a one-sided humanistic stance in ethics. Stoicism became one of the pillars of Classical culture for five hundred years. Even after the school disappeared (in the 3rd century CE), it still had a considerable influence on European culture.

Stoicism’s view of humanity is based on a pantheistic worldview. Its world is suffused with a divine spirit, a universal intelligence that expresses itself most significantly in human rational thinking. Because of this divine element, which comprises the essence of our being and leads us, we possess the possibility of knowing and realizing the good. If we allow only reason, the divine principle, to guide us, our passions will lose their grip on us. Instead, our knowledge of ethics will determine our behaviour, which means that we will become righteous, benevolent, courageous, temperate, etc. In short, we will become virtuous.

The Stoics believed that some people actually possess wisdom and virtue and could be regarded as nearly perfect human beings. However, in their

view, few people measured up. They believed that most people lack insight and ethical qualities; i.e., they are of weak intelligence with strong untamed passions and, in their development, not much higher than animals. In Stoical writings, we often come across a division between the "wise" and the "fools."

The Stoics are not alone in their nearly unlimited trust in reason and marked lack of humility. Similar views can be found among many humanists from the Enlightenment until today (less so since 1918 and then normally in modified or camouflaged form).

In our time, most people recognize that such attitudes lead to many errors and dangers. But it is useful to try to pinpoint their weaknesses, both theoretically and practically.

First and foremost, such views demonstrate a surprising lack of awareness of sin. If we believe ourselves (as did the Stoics) to be well on our way to becoming good, we must have very limited knowledge of the good and of ourselves. We cannot really have understood that neighbourly love is the good. If we had, we would have to come to a different conclusion about our moral condition; we would have realized how many unkind thoughts we harbour and how many kind deeds we have evaded out of selfishness and self-centredness. Indeed, our self-knowledge must be very poor because we disregard how many of our actions only appear to be moral when, in fact, they are actually motivated by such selfish motives as vanity.

One-sided humanists also have an incorrect view of their own positive character traits, which they attribute to their own efforts and merit. They do not realize the extent to which their morally acceptable qualities are conditioned by fortunate circumstances in their past (inborn abilities, upstanding role models, good treatment) or by helpful factors in the moment (their energy, mood, inspiration). They especially do not clearly realize that whatever goodness is found in their character, it developed under of the influence of others.

These failings in knowledge have practical consequences. In a number of ways, a one-sided humanistic attitude in ethics will lead to a limitation of neighbourly love.

First of all, undervaluing how much our own positive personality traits owe to others leads to overestimating our self-worth and also curtails important feelings of gratitude. A weak understanding of the intimate interaction between people encourages self-centredness and reduces our consideration of others. True neighbourly love cannot thrive in the soil of extreme individualism. One of the prerequisites of neighbourly love is the recognition that one individual does not make a meaningful whole, which only arises in interaction with others.

Secondly, the inability to recognize our own sins leads to an underdeveloped sense of tolerance. There is a close connection between recognizing our own failures and those of others. People who have not discovered their own character flaws will often relate judgmentally to the flaws of others with supercilious tolerance, a false tolerance, while basking in their own generosity, liberality, wisdom, etc.

Weak self-awareness can also lead to feelings of having received undeservedly bad treatment from others or from fate. Such people often nurse unfounded grievances and fall victim to bitterness and self-pity, or else they consider it a great achievement not to have those feelings. The latter is related to false tolerance. (The Stoics frequently expressed both these forms of self-satisfaction).

In addition, someone with great inner spiritual resources but lacking a corresponding intense understanding of our dependency on external forces will tend to divide people into a small, privileged elite and all the rest, the "common" folk. Think of the Stoics' division between the wise and the fools, or Goethe's concept of "*der gute Mensch*" [the good person] and his claim of a small number of "*Lieblinge der Götter*" [the beloved of the gods], whom nature has equipped with better morals. Or, consider Georg Brandes's idea some years later about the unique ones who, by virtue of their intelligence and ethos, towered above common folk: "In my life I constantly return evermore

passionately to hero worship, worshipping those few who create and understand."[29]

Dividing humanity into the inspired few and the common masses is a consequence of overlooking the real internal division between the divine and the human. We do not recognize narrow-minded self-obsession as a power in our own minds. Instead, we project it onto others who are not among "the chosen." Not recognizing our own powerlessness—that our ego is in the hands of powerful unknown forces—we view the powerlessness that actually characterizes world history and human interaction as an issue for the common folk who, in contrast to the "chosen," lack guiding insight and will, and are therefore tossed helplessly hither and yon. Thus, we can reasonably conclude that the notion of two kinds of human beings results from a lack of humility. This is the distinction between Cicero and Kierkegaard. Cicero's statement that the gods are only concerned with important people[30] is sharply rejected by Kirkegaard, who states, "For God every human is equally important, unconditionally of equal importance."[31]

Lack of humility produces other unfortunate effects as well. A view that undervalues the majority of people will do little to encourage neighbourly love. Neighbourly love presumes respect for all one's fellows, in the recognition that we all have divine possibilities and that we are all equal—and equal in our ability to squander these possibilities as well. As our biblical tradition says, we are all God's children and we are all sinners. The division into super-humans and sub-humans is harmful not only because it devalues the many, but also because it idolizes the few. As we get to know our idols, we often have one of two reactions: we close our eyes to their all too human frailties in order to maintain our idolatry—and self-delusion can be very counter-productive—or, we suffer many disappointments, which shakes our

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[29] Quoted in Henri Nathansen, *Georg Brandes* (2nd ed.), 1950, p. 62.

[30] Cicero, *De natura deorum* [The Nature of the Gods], II, chapter 66.

[31] Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaards Papire*, [Kierkegaard's Papers], X 4, A 442.

belief in them to the point of hatred and bitterness. Idolizing anyone—like any kind of idol worship—leads to moral failure.

Finally, one-sided humanists find it difficult to accept good deeds from others. They have a tendency to feel awkward about being the receiver instead of the giver, and may even feel humiliated. It is different for those who understand that when they give, they have already received, because they rightfully regard as gifts their abilities, inspiration and the goodness they have experienced in their lives. Those who feel humility to God will not feel humiliated when they need to receive what has been bestowed on others to give them. However, extreme humanists have a sense of pride that necessitates their being the giver or at least the ones who make it on their own, independent of the help and goodness of others.

The Stoics were more ready to give than to receive. Seneca, for example, states:

> The wise man, I say, self-sufficient though he may be, nevertheless desires friends if only for the purpose of practicing friendship, in order that his noble qualities may not lie dormant. Not however for the purpose mentioned by Epicurus, … "that there may be someone to sit by him when he is ill, to help him when he is in prison or in want" but that he may have someone by whose sick-bed he himself may sit, someone a prisoner in hostile hands whom he himself may set free.[32]

Concerning scientific knowledge

I will treat this issue briefly since ethics is the focus of this book. The reason I consider it at all is because one's attitude to scientific knowledge has ethical consequences.

Extreme humanism expresses itself in this field as rationalism, a conviction that there are no barriers to scientific knowledge. There is nothing in existence that is inaccessible to exhaustive investigation. This includes the human soul. Some rationalists believe that whatever mysteries the soul holds

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[32] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae*, English translation by Richard M. Gummare, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917, p. 47.

can be eliminated by revising common concepts, such as by a logical analysis of language or a thorough psychological analysis. Materialists believe that the soul can be explained by a thorough analysis of chemical processes.

It is beyond the scope of this book to counter these views. I will simply point out that it is a strange assumption that our spirit is able to investigate itself. After all, no one believes that it is possible to lift oneself up by one's own hair.

I want to draw attention to the ethical dangers in humanistic rationalism, which somewhat contradictorily argues for rationalism mixed with a strong belief in ethical development.

Humanistic rationalism lacks an appreciation for the mystery that is thinking and feeling, indeed, any expression of life. Such rationalism can lead us to be wanting in true respect of our fellows. When we view our fellows as phenomena that can be subjected to investigation in the manner of the exact sciences, we might not stop ourselves from treating them as things.

Erich Fromm writes, "*Man is not a thing*; he cannot be dissected without being destroyed."[33]

Fromm emphasizes that in our culture there is a great danger in "reifying the human" (making the human a thing) and that modern psychology and psychiatry is implicated in this process of alienation:

> [The psychiatrist] does not look at the patient as a global, unique totality which can be fully understood only in the act of full relatedness and empathy. … The final understanding cannot be expressed fully in words; it is not an 'interpretation' which describes the patient as an object with its various defects, and their genesis, but it is a global, intuitive grasp.[34]

Our inner core can only be intuited. It remains a mystery inaccessible to scientific knowledge. Only by recognizing this can we interact with others

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[33] Erich Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ: and other essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*, London: Routledge Classics, 2004, p. 159.

[34] Ibid., p. 164-165.

with the respect due to their spirit and life. We can never be "done with" a person but must always consider the possibility that something surprising could happen.

A belief (superstition) in the omnipotence of scientific knowing coarsens relations between people. The idolization of science in our time is an ethical danger. Rightfully, Schweitzer emphasized that the basis of ethics is reverence for life, that a humble view of life—as a gift and a task—is the condition for true neighbourly love.

B. One-sided humility

Concerning ethics

A one-sided, humble anti-humanistic attitude has been promoted by many of Christianity's great teachers, such as Paul, Augustine and Luther, and in the 20th century, by Barth.

Their main point is an absolute discontinuity between God and us because humans are utterly powerless and sinful, and incapable of showing neighbourly love (because of our irresistible, often well-camouflaged egoism). We cannot become better through effort; we can only improve by God lifting us out of our powerlessness and wretchedness.

Augustine arrived at the conviction that Greek humanism (to which he was previously committed) was an error. He rejected the shared Platonic and Stoic view that humans on their own—by developing knowledge—can work towards greater perfection. Instead, he claimed that our nature is corrupted by sin and we therefore possess no freedom to overcome it. Whether a person becomes more or less sinful is entirely in God's hands. It depends on whether God implants something utterly new in the person—the seed of a new nature that, as long as the seed receives grace, will gradually drive away his former nature.

A humanist could easily challenge the very notion of a personal God. But that is not the issue here. We will focus on the objection many believers make, including some prominent Christian theologians.

First, the proposed view is full of serious contradictions. If we are incapable of anything good, not even the ability to attempt the good and show our willingness to receive grace, it must be out of despotic arbitrariness that God chooses to liberate some from the chains of sinfulness while leaving others to hopeless corruption. God has made a decision without regard for the individual's attitude. According to Augustine, Calvin and Luther, it has been decided before our birth whether we are predestined for salvation or corruption. Such a view of God is completely contrary to the belief in a loving Father. Combined with a belief in hell, it is an utterly horrid thought that the poor people who are not chosen, in addition to being unable to improve in this life, have to suffer tortures after death.

Just as this view of God is inconsistent, so too is this view of humanity. Both the Jewish Bible and the Gospels make it clear that people are subject to ethical demands and are responsible for their commitment to these demands. This idea presumes that we possess the ability to take different attitudes to those demands, that we are not will-less slaves to a corrupt nature. There is a deep chasm between this view of humankind and the theology that teaches our absolute powerlessness regarding the good.

This teaching, apart from being contrary to the biblical view of God and humanity, is also unreasonable. Indeed, the view that people possess no freedom to choose between good and evil has been put forth many times from Antiquity to our time by some remarkable philosophers, scientists and theologians. But our spontaneous sense of having some ability to decide what to make of our lives is so elementary that no theological insight, philosophical acumen or scientific understanding is able to repudiate it as pure illusion.

Whenever guilty feelings arise in consequence of holding the above view, they become unreasonable. Since it is not in our power to avoid sinning, feelings of guilt cannot meaningfully be aimed at our sins. Therefore, these feelings will take on another form; namely, not feeling sufficiently guilty. In this way, guilty feelings turn in on themselves because the duty we have failed in is the duty of wholeheartedly feeling like a sinner and not in the duty to

become kinder to our fellows. Here we face the phenomenon Professor Løgstrup mentions in his discussion of Kierkegaard:

> The perception of sinfulness perpetuates itself; it feeds on its own uncertainty as to its sufficiency and not on any actual fault. It lives its own pale and bloodless semblance of life detached from any ethical situation.[35]

It is clear that these contradictions and the unreasonableness of radical anti-humanist theology are not only of theoretical interest but have practical implications.

Anti-humanist theology does demand neighbourly love. But no effort can ever be optimal when it comes from the conviction that it is useless because any outcome is solely dependent on other factors. The idea of the utter corruption of human nature is not a very fruitful point of departure when it comes to neighbourly love.

Not only is it not fruitful because it undermines our self-confidence, but it also affects our relations with others. It leads us to regard our fellows as corrupt beings, which cannot promote respect and kindness toward others.

Concerning scientific knowledge

Humility in the scientific field is often expressed by the setting of limits to what we are allowed to investigate. This was fairly commonly done in earlier times and we still encounter it in our more optimistic era. Since it has some ethical consequences, I will discuss it briefly.

What this view demands is respect for nature's (life's, God's) secrets. Consequently, scientific research that delves into these secrets commits a kind of sacrilege.

We can easily recognize the unreasonableness of this view. But refusing the use of reason is precisely the problem here. This view demands a general restraint on the use of reasoning because it is regarded almost as witchcraft. However, even a modest application of reason should prove that reason is not

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[35] K.E. Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard* [Settling with Kierkegaard], 1967, p. 137.

at fault in the innumerable catastrophes people have caused. Indeed, many of them—such as suppression, exploitation, persecution and war—must be laid at the door of unreason. Lack of reasoning as well as ignorance also lie behind greed, hunger for power, vanity and other moral weaknesses.

It is also easy to see that any division between allowable and unallowable research (or its uses) would be arbitrary. Why should we be allowed to discover electricity but not atomic power? Or, to use a technological example, why should we be allowed to build ships but not spaceships?

It is dangerous to demand that science and technology stop exploring certain taboo subjects. Had this happened, we would have been cut off from much knowledge that has proved beneficial; for example, astronomy's discovery that the earth is not the centre of the universe has helped us move away from bigotry and self-obsession. Scientific research must be allowed its freedom because it is impossible to know in advance whether its investigations will lead to valuable insights. In fact, it is certain that they will not lead to knowledge that is ethically corrupt all on their own.

It is awful to reflect on how much proscriptions may have cost us in unrelieved suffering. Consider the Vatican's position against birth control.

Even though technological developments have been utilized in terrible ways, they have never by themselves caused harm. On the contrary, they have created favourable external conditions for happiness—and comfort.

C. Combining humanism and humility

Complementarity between the two attitudes

We have seen that when consistently followed, both attitudes are fraught with problems in knowledge and have unfortunate ethical consequences. As for their attitude to science, we have seen both a misrecognition of the wonder of life and the supposition that certain areas are taboo.

Humanism and humility must be combined. People must recognize themselves as both created and creators.

On one hand, we must have confidence in our abilities. Confidence is a precondition for making a full effort of will, for the full expression of our abilities and powers and for a full sense of responsibility. We must feel that we have God-given abilities and that there is something divine in us.

On the other hand, we must recognize our powerlessness, not only with respect to our failures—such as in fulfilling the commandment to love our neighbour and in comprehending the wonder of life—but also with respect to our best efforts. "*Alles Höchste, es kommt frei von den Götern herab*"[36] [All of the best comes freely from the gods], says Schiller, who combined his humanism with humility. We must recognize that we are thoroughly dependent on an external authority and we must experience the divine as a power external to us.

But isn't such a combination of pride and humility logically impossible? Isn't there a contradiction between God as immanent (inherent in nature, in humans and in everything else in creation) and as transcendent (as separate, external to the world); between monotheism that sees God and humanity as one and the dualistic view of an absolute contradiction between God and humans?

Of course there is a contradiction between these views. But it is a contradiction of a particular kind. It is rooted in a fundamental peculiarity of our essence and existence and it therefore cannot be rejected as logically unallowable. Humans are spirit and nature, creating and created, cause and effect. This paradoxical condition must be reflected in our view of life. We must have a paradoxical understanding of humans as both free and conditioned; a paradoxical view of ethics as both duty and happiness; a paradoxical understanding of God as both immanent and transcendent. We are facing a special form of contradiction and interdependence: complementarity.

[36] Schiller, *Das Glück*, 1798, Stanza 14.

There are worldviews that are both proud and humble, founded on the complementarity between humanism and humility, in both the Greek and Christian traditions. In the former, we frequently encounter one-sided humanism and in the latter, one-sided humility. But we also find statements of complementary views of God in Plato's portrayal of Socrates and in the Bible.

Socrates: humanism, but also humility

Socrates' view of life was conspicuous by his optimistic trust in human abilities with respect to goodness and truth.

His confidence is evident in his main ethical teaching that all that matters is achieving a better understanding, a clearer and deeper knowledge, and in his work, the conversations on ethics he pursued day in and day out with tireless enthusiasm.

At the same time, he had confidence in the scientific process. Socrates and his contemporaries strove to find accurate definitions of concepts and proper argumentation. In his attention to logical problems, he was also a pioneer. He was convinced that intellectual work could contribute to the ennobling of our characters.

However, Socrates also talks resolutely about our deep ignorance. In the *Apology*, he interprets the Delphic Oracle's declaration that he is the wisest of humans this way:

> What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said, "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless."[37]

This is an important thought. We can assume that since Socrates ascribes it to Apollo, it was of great significance to him.

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[37] Plato, *Complete works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, p.22.

The ignorance he addresses first and foremost implies weak ethics because, for him, morality is dependent on knowing. Socrates sees ignorance in two forms. First, our ethical insights lack clarity. In all his encounters, Socrates observed that despite every effort it is not possible to define central ethical concepts or establish a conclusive argument for the validity of our perceptions of good and evil; for example, when we are confronted with the idea of the right of the powerful. Second, ethical knowledge usually lacks depth. It is mainly expressed in superficial thoughts and words, not in action or attitude (which it would if it were true knowledge); it swims about in the mind but it never dives into the heart or settles in the bone.

Wisdom is found, Socrates believed, only with God (the gods); all people are ignorant. Socrates does not divide people into the fools and the wise, as do the later Stoics. He, himself, feels ignorant. His statements to that effect are not ironic. In contrast to the Sophists, he did not create a school, nor did he write a philosophical system.

Nonetheless, he was convinced that God had implanted a tiny seed of wisdom in humans—in all humans. Just as no one possesses wisdom, no one is cut off from experiencing a glimpse of its light. No one is excluded from the human community. What we can do is pursue truth through honest conversation and thus set each other free from false knowledge—bigotry and superficial opinions—which blocks the growth of the divine seed. For that reason, Socrates describes his conversational work as midwifery. He seeks to help deliver life; he cannot create it. Only God can create life and make it grow. “There is no good that we do not receive from them [the gods].”[38]

Socrates is grateful for life, which he considers a gift. He also reveres life as a wonder. His attitude to the possibilities inherent in scientific knowledge exhibits great humility. He distanced himself from the contemporary natural philosophy of his time that sought an exhaustive explanation of the world. Among other things, he criticized the view that

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[38] Ibid., p. 15.

everything could be explained mechanically. He sought a teleological explanation and he sensed a fundamental problem between the two explanations: the mechanical view presumes necessity, lawfulness; the teleological view presumes choice, life. However highly he regarded intellectual cognition and however much he used it, he knew that we do not possess the means to solve the real mysteries of existence. Humans are—as he interpreted the words of Apollo—fundamentally ignorant.

Socrates' attitude to life was characterized both by humanism and by humility. To understand how he integrates his concept of all-important knowledge with his view of endlessly ignorant humanity, we must recall his constant reference to the Delphic admonition, "Know thyself!" For Socrates, this meant that people must learn to know themselves both in their greatness—with god-given abilities for the development of and insight into goodness—and in their insignificance, in their dependence on and their powerlessness in the face of God. The connection between the two is clear. The moment we realize intellectually what goodness is, we will discover our ignorance and wretchedness. If we humbly recognized our powerlessness, we would be freed from much superficial knowledge and feeling of superiority. This would open a path to insight and fellowship.

It is Socrates' conviction that we must make a significant effort on our own to emerge from the darkness. Our effort is a necessary condition. But it is not sufficient. Nothing great happens for us without divine help. However, Socrates believed that God would send us help if we seriously sought goodness.

The Bible: humility, but also humanism

Here, I will only address the attitude toward the good, because the Bible does not address scientific knowledge. (Of course, this fact does hint at an attitude because certain taboos would otherwise have been stated. In the Bible, there is no support for the kind of humility that creates barriers to research or is irreconcilable with humanism).

Sin is a cornerstone of the Gospels. In the Jewish Bible, we also find equally strong statements of this, such as:

> Have mercy upon me, O God,
> as befits Your faithfulness;
> in keeping with Your abundant compassion,
> blot out my transgressions.
> Wash me thoroughly of my inequity,
> and purify me of my sin;
> for I recognize my transgressions,
> and I am ever conscious of my sin.[39]

The view that people are not able to achieve anything valuable on their own is clearly expressed in these lines, “Unless the Lord builds the house, / its builders labor in vain on it.”[40]

The necessity of humility as a prerequisite for neighbourly love is elucidated in the story of the Tower of Babel. When people believe in their own importance and ability and no longer have reverence, they lose their ability to understand one another, and good relations are replaced with division and strife. Weakened respect for God expresses itself as weakened respect for our fellows.

However prominent humility is in all the biblical writings, we must not overlook that in most of them there is an important humanistic element.

Granted, the idea of God as all-powerful must logically lead to the idea of human powerlessness. If all power is literally God’s, the consequence must be that humans have absolutely none. Christianity’s first theologian, Paul, came to the same conclusion.

But systematic thinking built on strictly logical concepts of God’s power (as if it could ever have an exact meaning) is not found in Jesus’ words or in the Jewish Bible. In both, the ethical commandments are so central that it is implied that to a certain extent—however small—people are able to conform

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[39] Psalms, 51.3-5.

[40] Palms, 127.1.

to them. Alongside the idea of an all-powerful God, we find the notion that people are not completely powerless.

This duality has been maintained and emphasized by outstanding theologians, despite the fact that the aim of theology is to create order and clarity.

The duality has been maintained in the knowledge that it does not represent confusion but respect for the mystery of life, which will never be resolved.

In the Talmud, we find this pointed statement: "Everything is in the hand of heaven, except the fear of heaven."[41] Only a superficial reading would give the impression that this is a solution to the problem, that a successful division had been found between God's competence and that of humankind. Fear of heaven is not seen as a separate area that can be delimited against factors of fate; rather, it pervades the attitude toward all that is given by God, especially toward our fellows. What is suggested in those words in the Talmud is an unfathomable interaction between the divine and the human. This is the aspect of human freedom that the Talmud emphasizes in combination with God as all-powerful. This pithy statement does not solve the problem but it casts some light on it.

The duality pervading most of the Bible and found in the work of many theologians is not based on muddled thinking but on honest realism and a deep understanding of life. The fundamental paradox of human existence is cherished so deeply that it is no longer regarded as a vagueness that we could remove with intensified efforts. We encounter the basic paradox that we are at once God's work, completely in the hand of heaven, and that we are ourselves divine, possessing the power to create.

In spite of this tension, there is an inextricable connection between the ethical and the religious, between love of neighbour and love of God, between humanism and humility. Humanism's love of neighbour becomes undermined

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[41] Meg, 25a; Ber, 33b.

if it is not combined with humility and gratitude, if it is not based on an experience of life as a wonder and a gift. Humility's love of God turns into superstition if it is not combined with confidence in ethical will.

The two views are complementary. In spite of their conflict, they make up a totality where one presumes the other. Without humility, there is no true humanism; without humanism, there is no true humility.

CHAPTER 4

THE LAWS OF LIFE

Introduction

The three previous chapters have one thing in common: they conclude with two opposing views or positions that are both true. This contradiction is not due to confused thinking but is something we must accept as a feature of our reality.

The task now is to gain greater understanding of this peculiarity. I discussed this issue in a preliminary fashion in Chapter 1, where I examined the problem of free will. Now I will address some wider implications of the contradiction.

I will attempt to show that the kind of contradiction mentioned in the previous chapters results in an unavoidable paradox that we face in many situations because of the fundamental fact that we are both willing and comprehending beings.

In section A, I list examples of those paradoxes—the contradictions we have to accept in order to stay free of prejudice and dishonesty, that force us to use our common sense. They are paradoxes that cannot be solved by disregarding them or by explaining away one of two evident truths.

Following these examples, section B discusses the question of how far it is possible to accept the paradoxes. Attempting to understand a paradox is naturally doomed from the beginning. If that were not so, the paradox would be solvable. What we are seeking is an understanding of why we are faced with something impenetrable. To that purpose, I will show that the paradoxes in section A and those raised in the previous three chapters are all expressions of one fundamental paradox of our very existence. Subsequently I will take a closer look at the special character of this paradox.

In section C, I will present some of the modern thinkers, on whose work I have developed my argument. It is remarkable that the paradoxical—complementary, dialectical—nature of our existence has been so strongly underscored and so keenly analyzed by many important thinkers in the last half-century, including physicists, philosophers and theologians.

A. Paradoxes in our existence

Non-ethical paradoxes

Paradoxes of an unsolvable nature also arise outside of the especially problematic field of ethics.

Even in the natural sciences, we encounter a fundamental paradox. A scientist must remain completely open to all observations regardless of whether they fit a theory. On the other hand, a scientist will be unable to formulate a theory without first hypothesizing from specific observations. A scientist must not be influenced by preconceived notions; yet, he must be guided by conjecture, by a working hypothesis, in order to make an observation. A scientist must know which experiments and investigations would be reasonable to pursue.

Einstein put it this way: "*Erst die Theorie entscheidet darüber, was man beobachten kann.*"[42] [The theory decides what you are able to observe]. Based on this view, Einstein maintained that the observations in atomic physics that contradicted Newtonian physics had to be incomplete. Bohr went the other way. We are told that he was troubled by the new observations' incomprehensibility in Newtonian physics, which maintains that any physical process is determined by previous events and that its future course is predictable. By taking his point of departure from the new observations that could not be disregarded, Bohr came to the understanding that he expressed

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[42] Quoted in Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze* [The Part and the Whole], Munich: Piper Verlag, 1996, p. 80.

in his theory of complementarity. This theory implies a widening of the classical concepts of physics, but does not refute them.

In other situations, it was Einstein's approach that led to new insights. A scientist must acknowledge both approaches, even though doing so involves a paradox. A scientist must at times say, "That observation cannot be right," and at other times, "We must accept the observation whether we understand it or not—we cannot reject the facts." These statements are complementary. Science can only work on the basis of the interplay between analysis and synthesis, between an empirical-critical stance and a philosophical-constructive stance. This is a paradox that we must not try to explain away. It is a reality that we must accept.

There is another paradox that we experience in almost any kind of work; namely, that our best work results from a unity of spontaneity and sense of purpose. It is well known that a sense of pleasure is motivating and that it is hard to become good at something for which one has no talent. On the other hand, many musical and literary masterpieces were created on commission and under deadline pressure. Perspiration can lead to inspiration. We also know this firsthand from essay assignments at school.

We encounter such a paradox between spontaneity and restraint in many pursuits. It is self-evident that orderliness can be a drain on one's energy when it doesn't allow for spontaneity. It is equally true that a certain amount of order is life enhancing when it keeps us from hesitation and doubt. Says Freud: "The benefits of order are undeniable: it enables people to make the best use of space and time, while sparing their mental forces."[43]

In all manner of situations, we encounter the fact that restraint can be freeing and that total freedom can be inhibiting due to an embarrassment of riches; doubt emerges when we face too many possibilities. That a reduction of options can enhance a work can be seen in the arts. Bohr thought that what

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[43] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Translation by David McLintock, London: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 44.

characterized a true poet was that he was not hindered by a rhyming scheme but, on the contrary, was inspired by it and by other restraints in the poem's specific form: the demands of the poem's form is an incitement to the amplification and enrichment of its content.

Many people live their lives spontaneously, guided only occasionally by reflection. For others, the reverse is true. A spontaneous, extraverted lifestyle and a reflective, introverted lifestyle can both lead to full lives if they are not followed too slavishly. If all orderly thinking and rules are absent from our lives, we miss out on a great many enriching opportunities, and vice versa when second-guessing and reflection take over. When attention to the future, to the past or to generalities suppresses our impulsiveness, it can undermine our health and joy. This is a paradox because spontaneity requires some reflection in order to be expressed fully; and, conversely, reflection requires some spontaneity in order to maintain itself. The relationship between spontaneity and reflection is complementary.

Just as we face a practical dilemma in the way we live, we also face a theoretical dilemma in our view of life. We encounter the same paradox faced by science between the necessity of experimental data and intuition, between empirical and philosophical approaches. A life view must combine a methodical disposition with vision.

René Dubos refutes a mechanistic description of humanity:

> The methods used by the investigator determine and limit the kind of observations he can make. If scientists elect to study man only by physicochemical methods, they will naturally discover only the determinants of his life and find that his body is a machinery of atoms. But they will overlook other human characteristics that are at least as interesting and important. One of them is that man hardly ever reacts passively to external forces. The most characteristic aspect of his behavior is that he responds not only actively but often unexpectedly and creatively.[44]

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[44] René Dubos, *So Human an Animal*, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968, p. 132.

The wise Finnish-Swedish writer Göran Schildt has encouraged similar thoughts. He maintains that the progress of the natural sciences and technology has hindered the progress of understanding our humanity in those areas where we are self-creating (religion, philosophy, education, politics, etc.). In those areas, we are more than the sum of our parts and an analysis of details is insufficient. Schildt concludes that:

> We come to the paradoxical result that in our time, just as in earlier times, we need visionaries, who can see the greater view in the light from a single bulb, people who can see the inner unity.[45]

Since such a vision must reflect the whole of our being, not only our intellectual abilities but also our will to life. It must include an element of optimism—an optimism that expresses our creativity and cannot be proven by reason alone. Such optimism is not irrational. We are talking about the kind of optimism that grows out of a strong will, not the optimism of wishful thinking that appears whenever real knowledge gives way to fantasy. We are talking about the kind of optimism that begins at the limits of our knowledge.

Schildt makes this pregnant statement: "Our task is not to describe the human being, but to create him."[46]

This is the principle that must determine our answer to the question about the future of our culture. If we only describe humanity, if we only study our history and from that derive conclusions about our nature and how the future will unfold, we must infer that we always have been and always will be egotistical and slow-witted. We must infer that we are driven more strongly toward power, honour, riches and carnal pleasures than toward spiritual pleasures and fellowship. If we rely only on scientific knowledge, we must agree with Spengler who, based on historical and biological research, maintained that our culture is facing its demise because all previous cultures

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[45] Göran Schildt, *Kontrakurs* [Counter Course], 1966, p. 60.

[46] Ibid. p. 61.

have followed the same progressive phases of growth, peak and collapse as every living thing.

On the other hand, if we acknowledge the truth of free will, we could, in spite of recent horrors, remain persuaded that "truth, love, peaceableness, meekness, and kindness are the violence which can master all other violence."[47] So said Albert Schweitzer, who strongly opposed Spengler's cultural pessimism. In his essay, "The Fate of the West," Jørgen Nielsen states:

> Our existence has many more dimensions than those Spengler finds it worth considering. For example, we could hazard working for civilization. I don't mean for the clumsy construction that is our current civilization, but for a better one, a qualitatively better culture, and work for what one actually believes.[48]

Ethical paradoxes

As in the previous section, I will begin with something relatively concrete and then move toward some general observations.

In sexual morality, we encounter an unsolvable paradox. We value the natural free expression of our sexuality but, at the same time, we value modesty. Or, do we see modesty as a product of old prejudices that we are happy to leave behind?

It is worth heeding Professor Løgstrup:

> Modesty serves that unity of our sensuality and our spirituality that belongs to undivided love. It serves to prevent desire from separating from love and becoming destructive. … It is modesty's greatest contribution to create the unity between our sex drive and our soul's expression of love.[49]

Looked at more closely, this is not a contradiction but a paradox between freedom and modesty. Our capacity to love can only flourish where modesty

[47] Albert Schweitzer, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924, p. 102.

[48] Jørgen Nielsen, "Hvem er vi?" [Who are we?], 1967, p. 146.

[49] K.E. Løgstrup, *Kunst og Etik* [Art and Ethics], 1961, p. 65.

exists, and only where there is natural open desire will we find true modesty instead of prudishness, which is "a form of empty modesty. Prudishness—but not modesty—can be increased or diminished in upbringing."[50]

In the context of a superficial ideal of naturalness in sexual morality, we may raise the issue of a simplistic ideal of honesty toward oneself. Schildt talks about "our strange psychosis of honesty," which has caused "a backward move in our ethics."[51] Honesty cannot be an independent ideal. It must be united with ethical will. It is no great accomplishment to admit honestly that you are very sensitive to criticism unless you have the will to become less sensitive. Such an attitude isn't even wrongheaded honesty. Indeed, it is not honesty at all if the word is to have any meaning. It is just a refined form of self-satisfaction. We get to feel superior to everyone who is less "honest"—based, possibly, on an actual feeling of shame (such as the worst manifestations of the Oxford movement.)

But it is a paradox that honesty must be combined with ethical will. Løgstrup states:

> "The question is, can a person view yesterday's failure with the full seriousness that its consequences demand and still hear the demands of today's new situation?"[52]

Can honest recognition of sin unite with real ethical will? It is necessary for both aspects to be genuine in order to prevent honesty from turning into self-satisfaction and ethical will, into a form of self-satisfaction. Such self-satisfaction results from too low an opinion of ethical claims and too high an opinion of oneself.

Just as a realistic approach that demands personal honesty without an idealistic dimension is in error, so is an approach that demands nothing but acceptance and sympathy from others. There is much truth in Confucius'

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[50] Ibid., p. 66.

[51] Schildt, op. cit., p. 62.

[52] K.E. Løgstrup in *Skyld og Ansvar* [Guilt and Responsibility] by Stig Jørgensen et al., 1967, p. 65.

statement: “The noble person makes demands of himself, the simple person makes demands of others.” (The notion that I can make moral demands of myself but not of others is of course a paradox). Still, tolerant understanding is not enough. It must be combined with trust.

It is correct to think, “He is as he is and as he must be, given his situation (genes, experiences, etc.). I must accept that he has this character flaw and not always let myself be disappointed or angry because of it.” Nevertheless, this is an insufficient attitude. It can easily lead to diminishing the other person. It undervalues the other as a being with spirit and will. Even though it is paradoxical, I must add, “But he is human and not a cog in a wheel. So he has endless possibilities for goodness. I must continue to believe in him and if possible support him in his work on himself—just as I hope that he and others would do the same for me.”

The respect we wish to show our fellows by accepting them and understanding them, by respecting their idiosyncrasies, including their negative traits, turns into its opposite when it is not combined with trust and will. Because when it is not combined with trust and will, we would only respect them as individuals but would neglect their humanity. Respect for our fellows becomes distorted when not combined with the idea of humanness; i.e., our ability to know and our free will.

People who promote anti-idealistic sexual freedom, honesty and tolerance often believe that relationships between people should only rest on spontaneous warmth and not include the idea of respect. I am not using the word “respect” to mean respect for a person’s individuality, which is currently in vogue in our culture. But as respect for the other as a manifestation (albeit fragmented) of the idea of the human. In theological terms, what I mean is respect for the image of God in our fellows.

It is not due to ineptitude but rather wisdom that the word “respect” contains these two meanings, for the individual and for our humanity. The two attitudes only become meaningful when they work together. Respect for the individuality of others, with all their flaws, is only meaningful when combined with respect for their God-given humanity, and vice versa. Think

of Jesus' emphasis on the combination of two important commandments: love of neighbour presumes love of God (and vice versa).[53]

We cannot sustain a relationship with others based solely on instinctive fellow feeling, which is an offspring of instinctive love. We cannot base our ethics solely on our drives and feelings. Ethics demands thinking and will. It requires reflection and engagement with the other's ability to express his humanity, as well as the strength of will to counteract our own failures. Affection consisting solely of spontaneous feeling without the support of self-discipline leaves itself open to egotistical impulses and shifting moods (or interests).

Finally, with respect to proper upbringing, we encounter the same paradox we have already noted; namely, the dilemma of nature versus nurture.

Simplistic reverence for nature is expressed in statements like this one in an op-ed piece:

> Your children must go to bed early, be potty trained early, eat nicely, clean up after themselves, in short be good kids … all that's evil must be hushed up, hidden away, or does anyone still think it can be eradicated? … Only fear keeps the dirt in its place in the dark and on the day the arm of your authority is too short it will come pouring in. … Why not instead let children learn to decide for themselves how to cope with life's big issues, and for us to accept their answers even when they are different from ours.[54]

Of course, a child must have rich possibilities in order to develop his or her nature. Parents and educators must be aware that they are involved with an individual who claims attention and respect. Indeed, they are faced with a new life, which calls for gentleness and reverence. Far too often, parents try to make their children into images of themselves and to realize certain specific ideals—or force them to achieve goals they themselves were never able to achieve.

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[53] Matthew 22.37-40.

[54] P.A. Hanehøj, author of the op-ed "Dumme svin" [Stupid swine], in the newspaper *Politiken*, November 25, 1968.

But we are social beings who create communities and this demands a certain amount of conformity from growing children. We develop cultures that depend on the new generation learning from the previous one. Mosse Jørgensen, principal of an experimental high school in Oslo, who cannot be accused of lacking in liberalism, writes:

> We are just as fearful of using authority, even when it is authentic, as are the unreasonable young rebels of accepting it. Respect and discipline are concepts that frighten. … Out of fear of conflict with our theories and afraid of becoming like our parents we deny the young the support they should have.[55]

It is not possible to rear a child—indeed, it is impossible to base one's life—on a simplistic principle. It is always a dilemma. It is an art.

B. The fundamental paradox in our existence

I have already suggested that ethical paradoxes are actually expressions of one fundamental paradox—the contradiction and connection, the complementarity, between realism and idealism, nature and nurture, material and form, free expression and conformity, between life and the laws of nature.

The paradoxes mentioned in section A are also closely connected with one another and grounded in the fundamental paradox in our existence.

We encounter the same paradox in science and in our views of life. Just as science requires a paradoxical relationship between analysis and synthesis, between openness to individual observations and an intuition of the general (i.e., a hypothesis about how individual observations connect), our life view must also accept a tension between experience and idea, if you will, a vision. Such a holistic view must, as suggested above, include a creative element, a will to shape our science-based reality (and lived experience). Were we to accept that humans are nothing more than what biology, history, psychology and other disciplines reveal, we would overlook our "*mögliche Existenz*" [our possible existence], "*das, was der Mensch sein kann, wenn er selbst wird*"

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[55] Mosse Jørgensen, *Kunsten at overleve med en teenager i huset* [The Art of Surviving with a Teenager in the House], 1970, p. 32.

[what humans can become when they want it], as Jaspers puts it.[56] He is clearly inspired by Kierkegaard who states, "Do not plead that experience shows that such things do not happen in life; because this is irrelevant when it actually can happen."[57]

The contradiction and connection between spontaneity and planning, between a poet's inventiveness and the restrictions of poetic form, between openness and reflection, is an expression of the paradox between the individual and the general. These opposites express the relationship between momentary impulses and the necessity of coherence, of striving toward the general.

All these non-ethical paradoxes join up with the ethical ones. Their shared basis is the paradox between nature and nurture, between what pours forth from the individual in the moment and the general situation, between the material and the will to shape it, between living and rules.

Professor Sløk wrote a masterful historical overview of the dilemma of freedom versus dependency. After showing how the ancient Greeks swung between two extremes—from a view of humans as dependent beings, on the gods or on fate, to a view of humans as free and independent beings—he concludes:

> It seems that human life can only realize itself in a certain tension between dependence and freedom. When one of the poles is eliminated the tension is lost and humans submit to a total lack of possibility or we disappear among limitless options where no reality can exist."[58]

Socrates also came to the same conclusion.

The common source of all the issues in section A, despite their differences, is our basic paradoxical situation. We are beings of will and we are beings of cognition. In contrast to animals, we do not live solely in the

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[56] Karl Jaspers, *Vernunft und Existenz* [Reason and Existence], 1960, p. 147.

[57] Søren Kierkegaard, *Atten opbyggelige taler* [Eighteen Edifying Speeches], 3rd edition, ed. by H.O. Lange, 1940, p. 404.

[58] Johannes Sløk, *Fylde eller Tomhed*, [Fullness or Emptiness] 1968, p. 33.

now. We live in time; we live not only in instants of impulse that grow from our drives and passions, but also in arcs; we live in connections from which we gather knowledge. We do not only live out, we also live in, arranging our experiences and ourselves into totalities. Human life is at once free expression and arrangement.

This is the fundamental paradox that causes the insolubility of the general issues discussed in the previous chapters. The eternal controversy about free will must be answered both in the affirmative and in the negative in so far as we manifest our being both through will and through knowledge, both as creators and as part of the causal chain that is the object of our knowledge. The controversy about where to anchor our ethics—whether in the pursuit of our greatest happiness or in a submission to duty—should direct our thinking toward the fact that free expression and conformity are equal and primary forces in human existence. Finally, a worthy view of life requires humanistic trust in our capacities and humble acknowledgement of our ineffectiveness.

Concerning the duality and the unity of the paradox

Until now, I have mainly addressed the necessity of our accepting a pervasive paradox.

This paradox can also be seen to operate in history. Cultural history provides examples of fluctuations between periods of forceful, convincing and admirable assertions of a realistic-naturalistic view and of idealistic views in other periods; at times, radical ideas of freedom and at other times, conservative ideals of respect; at times, an optimistic humanistic view and at others, a humble view of devotion to God. Each of these attitudes contains (when observed without bias or fanaticism) such great wisdom and beauty that any simplistic judgment is impossible. Some great works of the past may help us to accept the strange contradictions of our existence. Pascal, one of the pioneers of complementary thinking, says, “We do not display greatness

by going to one extreme, but by introducing both at once, and filling all the intervening space."[59]

How is it possible to accept this contradiction? I attempted a small step toward an answer in the last section. Many contradictions become less objectionable once we realize that they are grounded in the same fundamental condition. But we must try to take a further step in our understanding by taking a closer look at what it is that is logically objectionable.

It is not logically objectionable for the reasons we might think. We are not forced to assume dualism, two basic but incompatible principles. Doing so would exclude us from finding the kind of unity and connection that is the aim of all knowledge. What is logically dissatisfying is that we must unite dualism and monism because, inevitably, we will always end up in situations characterized by both duality and unity.

For example, when we consider the relationship between desire and modesty in deep erotic passion, it is clear that we are dealing with two impulses that pull in opposite directions. After a little reflection, it becomes equally clear that the human erotic experience is a totality of these two seemingly irreconcilable factors. Only the passion that encompasses both desire (directed at anatomical-physiological qualities and/or isolated erotically relevant personality traits) and the modestly expressed thrill of the other's whole personality—only such passion can be characterized as *love*, a word I reserve for that most privileged of human experiences.

That erotic love is a totality of sensuality and spirituality expresses the fact that humans are a totality of body and soul. There is no basis for maintaining a monistic view that makes one of these factors the primary one, nor for maintaining a dualistic view that disregards the fact that body and soul cannot be delimited from one another. Only together are they meaningful. We are faced with a duality that is actually a unity. This could be seen as logically objectionable but I would rather call it the wonder of life.

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[59] Pascal, *Pensées,* (trans. by W.F. Trotter), Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003, p.98.

We find the same paradox in the relationship between the concepts of nature and culture. We can easily see their duality. But their unity is equally incontestable. The concept of human nature is meaningless when abstracted from our cultural manifestations. Nature and culture are exactly what is special about humankind. Conversely, culture that is not grounded in biological reality, that is not a cultivation of natural human abilities, cannot be called culture (but might instead be called artificiality and degeneration). The two concepts cannot be defined apart from each other. They only have meaning together; they presuppose each other. They are complementary.

We observe the same relationship with the concepts of free expression and conformity. It is often said that the goal of life is the full and free expression of the individual, to realize oneself. But does it make sense to think of the individual as an isolated phenomenon? Isn't it the case that we only really become ourselves when we interact with others?

Most of us have had the experience of discovering a hitherto unknown ability in ourselves through an interaction with another person. If in response to this we said that this ability must have always existed, albeit unnoticed, we would be simplifying and vulgarizing it. Humans are not objects that contain specific abilities. We embody a spirit that is realized only in situations where we interact with others. Self-realization can only happen in a relationship with another person. This relationship is interactive. If the relationship becomes dominating, possessive or exploitative, neither party will realize him/herself optimally. Only when both parties are at once subject and object, are open to each other and respectful of each other's characters, can they realize something of their individualities.

Professor Sløk states:

> To become oneself and to have a relationship with others are not two different functions, one following upon the other. They are one and the same function seen from two different angles. … This peculiar condition may be expressed by saying that the word "self" paradoxically includes others as well. … That we can only be for others by being ourselves—given the dialectics of the word self—means that in all relationships we must include respect for the other as a self. … I only exist as an "I" in

meeting a "you," a you that I don't immediately by observation and behaviour transform into a thing, an "it."[60]

Just as the concept of the "spiritual" does not refer to an independent reality that could de delimited with regards to the body but is an indispensable auxiliary concept, the word "individual" looked at closely does not have a precise meaning. The smallest meaningful unit is two individuals. When we speak about humans, the smallest entity is two people.

What is the practical consequence of simultaneously combining contrary ideals? The consequence must be that these ideals do not represent extremes that can be negotiated down to a "middle way."

The principle of the middle way should only be used when two ideals are simply contradictory, such as quickness and thoroughness in proofreading. In that case, you must naturally limit one in favour of the other in order to find an ideal way of working; a compromise must be made.

In such situations, we find our way once we are equally alert to the two mistakes we must avoid. But when we are dealing with the kind of ideals that have no meaning in isolation, we cannot find the proper course merely by being alert to the two dangers, by steering between Scylla and Charybdis. Instead, we must pick out the position of a single loadstar; namely, the unity behind the two ideas.

While we can calculate a middle way in proofreading (the optimal proportion of speed versus thoroughness), we depend on intuition to find the necessary unity between realistic assessment and idealistic optimism when dealing with others.

While the principle of the middle way is about coming to a middle point between two opposite goals, dealing with paradoxical twin ideals requires a deeper understanding of the beauty of both ideals. Such ideals do not pull in

[60] Sløk, op. cit., p. 33.

opposite directions but are deeply connected. It turns out that a quest for one of the ideals is dependent on living up to the other—and vice versa.

We see this in the case of the two previously mentioned ideals of sensibleness and strength of will. For strength of will to deserve its name and not merely degenerate into stubbornness or hunger for power, etc., it must be inspired by the contrary ideal of sensibleness. Only when we use our abilities purposefully are we able to maintain or increase them; strength of will becomes sensible. This is a well-known paradox. The same can be said of sensibleness. If we want to develop sensibleness beyond petty calculation, to develop a better overview and a deeper understanding of life's values, we must take inspiration from our will to life and passion. This in turn will determine the full activation of our will. The ideals of sensibleness and strength both exclude one another—we cannot in the moment unite reason and will—and presume one and other. They are complementary.

It may be useful to point out what happens if we take the middle way with complementary ideals. In that case, the ideals will not be realized, not even in the weakened form that is the goal of the middle way. They will become caricatures of themselves.

If an examiner attempts to calculate a halfway point between the ideals of justice and mercy, seen as two simple alternatives (i.e., as two independent, clearly separate norms), he actually misunderstands the meaning of the two words. He believes that justice can be registered and calculated at one hundred percent. This may be true when dealing with written assignments that can be evaluated with complete accuracy by a computer. But in an oral presentation—and this is where the problem of justice-mercy arises—interpretation will be part of the equation. A student's incorrect answer could have many causes (such as an unclear understanding of the question, nervousness, excitement, confusion, resignation). In such cases, empathy and humanity must play a part in arriving at justice. In addition, irrelevant factors such as benevolence caused by a student's charm or energy or good mood must be weeded out of the evaluation.

An examiner operating with a misunderstanding of justice and mercy—as separate ideals—cannot possibly arrive at anything remotely close to those terms. What he will arrive at is not a compromise between justice and mercy, both downgraded for the purpose of bringing them closer together. Instead, he will arrive at something altogether different; namely, a compromise between meaningless sensibleness (computer-like reasoning used on a human being in a living situation) and arbitrary benevolence conditioned by mood. The unity of justice and mercy will not come about through compromise, by weakening both, but by realizing their complementarity in such a way that the result is one hundred percent just and one hundred percent merciful.

In the case of twinned ideals, it is not about feeling our way to a middle point between extremes, but about pursuing both ideals so intensely and deeply that we sense their insoluble connection. We sense that they actually presume one another. Only by such an intuitive holistic awareness—that is often faulty and only evident in the moment—is it possible to find the proper path in any situation. We will often have to carry one of the ideals to an extreme. In other situations, both ideals may be enacted in a way that could be termed a middle way. But it is of crucial importance that this not happen through compromise. What matters is the recognition of the complementarity, not arriving at a compromise.[61]

C. The fundamental paradox illuminated by modern thinkers

In the last half-century, this paradox has been highlighted and investigated by several great thinkers, not only in philosophy and theology but also in physics.

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[61] Comparing the ethics of Socrates and Aristotle reveals the difference between complementarity and compromise. In his dialogues, Socrates hints at a unity behind contrary virtues (such as courage and sensibleness) that have no real meaning when viewed separately. For that reason, he finds it impossible to give exhaustive definitions of ethical concepts. He does not believe in a scientific ethics. On the other hand, Aristotle, promoter of *area mediocritas* ethics, defines and systematizes to his heart's content.

In physics

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, “complementarity,” the word that I have used for the peculiar paradox in our existence was used by Niels Bohr primarily to refer to a special phenomenon in physics. For Bohr, this scientific understanding interacted with a general philosophical insight. This insight was both a precondition for and the effect of his scientific discovery.

The physicist, T. Bergstein, explains:

> Niels Bohr has often suggested that quantum physics gave him experimental confirmation of an insight that—long before he got caught up in the problems of atomic physics—he had arrived at by involving himself in general questions in knowledge theory.[62]

In turn, the knowledge that Bohr arrived at in atomic physics affected his philosophical insight by deepening and clarifying it when he applied complementarity to human relations.

In a speech, Bohr said:

> In light of what we have learned from atomic physics about how we know, it is clear that words like thoughts and feelings that refer to psychological experiences and that exclude one another have been used in a complementary manner since the beginning of language.

Further on, he talks about the complementary relationship between experiences where we say, “I think” or “I will.” He continues:

> Here we arrive at the old question of what is the “I,” well known from both serious and entertaining discussions about every person’s many “I”s that observe each other and are in conflict with each other. While all attempts at coming to a final objective description that requires a firm contrast between subject and object, the possibilities in human life for preserving personal unity and maintaining the idea of free will are contingent on different placements of the division between subject and object in situations where we use words like reflection or drives.[63]

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[62] T. Bergstein in Ole Bostrup and T. Büllow-Hansen, op. cit. 1967, p. 110.

[63] Niels Bohr in a speech at the University of Copenhagen, April 19, 1961. Published in the newspaper *Politiken* the next day.

This is an insoluble paradox, at once duality and unity. The dividing line we draw between thought and feeling, between an observing, knowing "I" and a feeling, willing "I" is not a line drawn between two independent realities. It is merely a helpful division, necessitated by the conditions of our knowing. It is not a firm division. It is adjusted variously, depending on where we direct our thoughts.

This observation is an application to human life of the insights that atomic physics arrived at in the 1920s. Scientists encountered phenomena that could not be described by using the old physics' sharp distinction between subject and object. It turned out, says the physicist Werner Heisenberg, who was closely connected to Niels Bohr, that:

> We no longer observed the building blocks of matter "*an sich*" [in themselves], those building blocks that were formerly considered the final objective reality. They elude any objective placement in time and space. Basically, it is only our knowledge of these particles that we can consider scientifically. From the beginning we are placed in a contradiction between human and nature of which natural science is only a part. This means that the common division between subject and object, the inner and the outer world, body and soul, no longer has any validity, it only leads to complications.[64]

In his book, *Der Teil und das Ganze* [The Part and the Whole], Heisenberg describes the overwhelming effect on physicists when they confronted phenomena that could not be investigated in the terms of classical Newtonian physics. He describes how they—first and foremost, Bohr and himself—through long and intensive deliberation and conversations, came to the conclusion that the fundamental concepts in physics had to be revised (not in order to reject them but to find a wider conceptual framework for them). In addition, they had to accept a new way of understanding the concept of "to understand."[65]

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[64] Werner Heisenberg, *Fysik og humanism*, [Physics and Humanism], Danish edition, 1959, pp. 18-19.

[65] Werner Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze*, [The Part and the Whole], 1996, p. 55.

The fact that the strictest and most objective of the sciences had encountered situations in which the division between the observer (the equipment used) and the observed in principle made it impossible to firmly separate subject from object had significant consequences in our understanding of how and what we can know. The scientists had arrived at a fundamental aspect of our ability to know.

Bergstein puts it very precisely in his instructive book, *Kvantefysik og dagligsproget* [Quantum Physics and Daily Language]:

> The wide-ranging philosophical problems of language, reality, our world and consciousness may be characterized as due to a lack of insight into our fundamental condition as observing, knowing and communicating individuals. One of these fundamental conditions is complementarity. On one hand, every observation, understanding and communication consists of a division between subject and object. On the other hand, no observation, understanding or communication can happen without reciprocal action between subject and object. Division and reciprocity are equally important in these matters.[66]

It is a fundamental paradox.

Bohr's insightful concept of complementarity is often misunderstood and misused when applied in a superficial way. "People do not understand that complementarity is a hard thing," Bohr is quoted as saying.[67] He was referring to the firmness of the concept, its precise meaning and scientific justification, as opposed to the many unclear, even supernatural uses of the term.

Often the term is applied to simple contradictions that are not complementary at all, such as love and hate. These terms do not presume one another (only to the same banal extent that health can be said to presume illness). They do not comprise a totality. An ambivalent love-hate feeling is a

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[66] T. Bergstein, *Kvantefysik og dagligsprog* [Quantum Physics and Daily Language], 1966, p. 67.

[67] *Niels Bohr: His Life and Work as Told by a Group of his Friends and Co-Workers*, 1964, p. 224.

mixture, not a totality, because elements of hate are not necessary ingredients of love. On the contrary, they characterize a figurative love, like a possessive love centred on the desire to possess.

Just as people use the term complementarity in a meaningless way for all kinds of contradictions, they also use it to reduce contradictions to what should properly be called compromises.

More seriously, the complementarity acknowledged in atomic physics has been misconstrued as a discovery of natural processes that are free and without cause. Likewise, complementarity has been misinterpreted as scientific justification for viewing human actions as free from natural laws and subject only to our own decisions. Thus, it is a misunderstanding of complementarity to see it as an answer to the question of free will that has been debated for centuries by philosophers.

The new phenomena encountered by physics do not elude causation (in which case scientific investigation could not continue). They require a wider understanding of the concept of causality: simple deterministic causation (according to which individual processes are predictable) must be replaced by probabilistic calculation. What necessitates this expansion of the concept of causation is not that the observed atomic phenomena are, in principle, different from classical physics but the fact that the observer (the equipment used) has an unavoidable and subtle effect on what is being observed. It is not a new kind of physical process that that has been discovered but a greater understanding of the concept of causation and of the subject-object problem.

The theory of complementarity derived from atomic physics does not justify the existence of free will. On the contrary, it maintains that the question of free will cannot be answered—by a "yes" or a "no" or "partly"—because it cannot have an opinion on it when stated in this way. The fact that certain physical process cannot be described unambiguously but require two complementary descriptions may help us understand that the same holds true for human actions. Human actions cannot be understood from a single standpoint, but require two complementary views.

The theory of complementarity does not maintain that the world is constructed with room for free processes next to causal processes. Bohr rejected this interpretation as a simple misunderstanding. Complementarity is not a dualism arguing for two principles. There is no suggestion that the human world is divided into two spheres, one scientific subsumed under the law of causation and some other, higher sphere, where the chain of causation is broken.

From time to time, Bohr's insights are used to support supernatural religiosity. This is a complete misunderstanding. As Professor Mogen Pihl states:

> This view [the philosophy of complementarity] leaves no space for mysticism in the sense that it sets boundaries for the scientific investigation of phenomena occurring in life.[68]

It is true that Bohr's view of life was characterized by deep religiosity. But his religiosity was not a separate principle set apart from his scientific knowledge. Instead, science permeated his religious beliefs. His was a form of humility found in many other great physicists, such as Galileo, Newton and Einstein.

Viewing the concept of complementarity as a master key that opens all doors is also to misunderstand it. Bohr was not attempting to establish a philosophical system. Whenever Bohr applied the concept of complementarity to human relationships, he always did so cautiously because he understood that it is impossible to build such a system. After all, he was the one who emphasized that the dividing line between subject and object can be drawn in different ways.

Humanism and humility can be regarded respectively as a view for which reason is our fundamental and essential trait, and a view based on passion and centred in a feeling of reverence and devotion. Humanism can also be viewed as a passionate stance in terms of its idealistic belief in human freedom.

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[68] Mogens Pihl, *Den modern naturerkendelse* [Modern Knowledge of Nature], 1963, p. 73.

Humility distinguishes itself by its realistic understanding of our insignificance and dependency. This cannot be systematized. In different contexts, one and the same stance will sometimes appear to be based on reason and at other times, on dynamic emotions—i.e., sometimes relating to causation and sometimes to life in the now.

For Bohr, complementarity did not mean a solution to the mystery of life. Instead, it offered a deeper understanding of life's paradoxes. His will and amazing ability to produce knowledge conditioned his deep reverence for life.

In philosophy

Existentialism also highlights the fundamental paradox of our existence. That is, it does so to the extent that it breaks with determinism and instead puts forward a dialectical understanding that does not allow for a definitive answer to our fundamental questions. Church historian Paul Saxe explains it thus:

> "To be" is a constant dialogue with the world; we "are" nothing in ourselves. We "are" only in context, as part of a totality. … Existence is to exist in constant "conversation" with the world in recognition of the fact that an ultimate understanding can never be found, among other things, because one's own "I" is part of the world. The ethical consequence of this is that humans' principal existence lies in our relationship with our "neighbour."[69]

This dialectical view was greatly inspired by Kierkegaard, who in many ways anticipated ideas that came to the fore in this [20th] century. Kierkegaard, in turn, is indebted to the oldest dialectical philosopher in our culture: Socrates. For Socrates, dialogue (which shares a root with the word "dialectic"), with its constant shifting between two views, was not merely the method he always used in his work, it was also his principle, his way of arriving at knowledge.

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[69] Poul Saxe, *Kirkehistorie* [Church History], 1959; II, p. 183.

Karl Jaspers expresses the dialectical view is this manner: “There can be no man who is man by himself alone, as a mere individual.”[70] “The truth begins with two.”[71]

Whereas Sartre represents a non-dialectical form of Existentialism because he sets against one-side determinism an equally one-sided indeterminism (a paltry person, he says, cannot be excused by heredity and environment but has made himself paltry by his actions), Jaspers acknowledges the dialectical condition and the necessity of applying both deterministic and indeterministic views.

We find a similar view in Viktor Frankl’s psychiatric theories and treatment modality. Like Jaspers, he rejects pure determinism and pure indeterminism as simplifications.

On one hand, Frankl argues against the Freudian one dimensional, mechanical interpretation of humans. He claims that the Freudian view of our inner lives as a product of drives, heredity and environment ignores

> our principal element of spirit and our desire for meaning. In this preposterous view of humans, we become distorted and misrepresented. Because … instead of our primordial longing for meaning, it defines us by our instincts. Instead of the quest for values that is characteristic of humans, it substitutes a drive for pleasure.[72]

On the other hand, Frankl also distances himself from Sartre’s one-sided indeterminism:

> In so far as human freedom is conditioned, it is not identical with all-powerfulness. … At this point, existential analysis separates itself significantly from any form of Existentialism. … We are talking about an objective world of meaning and values, an ordered world, a cosmos; the

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[70] Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (translated by William Earle), NY: The Noonday Press, 1955, p. 77.

[71] Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom* (2nd edition, translated by Ralph Manheim), New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 124.

[72] Viktor Frankl, *Psykologiens menneskebillede* [Psychology’s Image of Humanity], Danish edition, 1970, pp. 106 and 89.

> logos, something objectively spiritual (eliminated in Existentialism) that is correlative with the subjectively spiritual in personal existence.[73]

Recognizing the dialectical relationship between subject and object, Frankl rejects both Freud's objectification of our psychic life and Sartre's elevation of the subject, the individual "I" as the only reality. In other words, we are neither solely driven (effect) nor solely creative (cause)—neither cog nor God.

To illustrate the dialectical relationship between humans as object (a biological phenomenon, determined) and as subject (a spiritual being with free will), Frankl projects a cylindrical glass onto a two-dimensional plane displaying a circle in one image and a rectangle in another. It would be a mistake to reject one in favour of the other. Likewise, despite the paradox, we must accept that humans appear in two ways and that we cannot be seen in our totality all at once. Frankl does not press the analogy. It should not be considered a solution to the ancient problem of spirit and matter (or, in another view, the solution to free will). It is meant to help our understanding of why the problem is unsolvable.[74]

In theology

Toward the end of World War I, Karl Barth presented a controversial view of Christianity termed "dialectical theology." But in so far as Barth maintains an absolute distinction between an almighty God and powerless humans, the designation "dialectical" is not truly appropriate. Poul Saxe writes:

> The term is unfortunate to the extent that "dialogue" requires mutual understanding and Barth talks about one-sided action from God. But in the context of idealism's claim of personal self-expression, dialectical theology emphasizes that humans are in constant tension, in a constant dialectical relationship with their environment and with God.[75]

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[73] Ibid., note 95.

[74] Ibid., pp. 130-132.

[75] Poul Saxe, op. cit., p. 188.

Dialectics appears well defined in the work of Rudolf Bultmann, one of the movement's most important representatives. He unambiguously accepts scientific research and its strict causation (which cannot accept miracles). But, at the same time, he maintains an ethical-religious attitude as a necessary complement:

> Faith does not offer another general world-view which corrects science in its statements on its own level. … The affirmation that God is creator cannot be a theoretical statement about God as *creator mundi* in a general sense. The affirmation can only be a personal confession that I understand myself to be a creature which owes its existence to God. It cannot be made as a neutral statement, but only as thanksgiving and surrender."[76]

In the work of Norwegian Bishop Eivind Berggrav, we also find many statements about the dialectical aspect of our existence. Concerning the paradox of the "I,' he says, "Facing the tiger inside yourself you want to be its trainer. However, you are simultaneously the tiger!"[77] And about the paradoxical condition for the realization of the "I," he says:

> He who wants to gain a personality, loses it. And the paradox can become terrible. The very thing that is our purpose, to become an "I," implies a barrier to God. … When I take my personality as the supreme value, when I stare at it and make my ideal "I" the focus of my life, the barrier appears, not only against God but also against my own development, indeed, against any happiness and liberation.[78]

Only by spontaneous dedication to our fellows do we gain character; only by self-forgetting can we reach full expression.

Here in Denmark, dialectical theology has had an important spokesman in P.G. Lindhardt. He sharpens the distinction between our knowledge of reality (the field of science) and reality itself, to which we relate through faith and action, thus making it our own:

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[76] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, pp. 65 and 69.

[77] Eivind Berggrav, *Kristendommens vej* [The Way of Christianity], Danish edition, 1962, p. 87.

[78] Ibid., p. 138.

> One thing is reality and another is, incommensurably, our knowledge of reality. We do not have a relationship with reality by having knowledge of it, when it is no longer reality but has become historical and statistical source material. We only relate to reality through our choice to engage in it as our own reality, our own life content. … The truth the Gospels address is not the one we come to by knowledge and thus control, it is the one we "make" by entering it.[79]

God cannot be viewed as an objective reality like the one investigated by science.

> God and our relationship with God cannot be separated from one another. God only exists in so far as we relate to Him. Only oneself, the individual—that is, each one of us—has the possibility of meeting God.[80]

The word "God" cannot be used as an explanation or as a guarantee. It must stand in for

> the experience that humans are not the rulers of their own life but have been given their existence and must now choose between acknowledging this and binding themselves to the gift responsibly or avoiding acknowledging it.[80]

In the same period, many Jewish theologians also proposed a dialectical view, first and foremost among them, Martin Buber. In his famous work, *I and Thou*, he states:

> The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.
>
> The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.
>
> The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou.*
>
> The other primary word is the combination *I-It*. … There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word of I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It.[81]

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[79] P.G. Lindhardt, *Religion og Evangelium* [Religion and the Gospels], 1954, p. 79.

[80] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[81] Will Herberg (ed.), *The Writings of Martin Buber*, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1956, pp. 43-44.

In *Meetings*, Buber defines a human being thus: “To be man means to be *the* being that is over-against.”[82]

The great German rabbi, Leo Baeck, emphasizes the fundamental paradox of considering God as infinitely distant—raised beyond human imagination and concepts—and simultaneously present. Human life must then be seen as dialectical, at once humble, conscious of God’s grandeur and might, and simultaneously as faithfully endeavoring, trusting in the nearness of God.[83]

Marcus Melchior, the Danish rabbi, expresses a dialectical view at the end of *Thought and Said*, where he expands on the existence of two kinds of truth. One kind of truth is scientific.

> The other is our learning from the past, with which we also want to influence, indeed, create the future. If this is carried forward with sincere and firm faith in our ability to give form to our own fate, then we do actually shape the future. In that way it is not truth that comes after events but events that follow the truth. What today can only be hinted at and sensed becomes truth. The two kinds of truth are like prose and poetry. … I put much weight on poetic truth, on its inspired and enthusiastic possibilities, because I see religious faith as an expression of poetic truth. It is part of the essence of God that we cannot prove His existence. If his existence could be proved, he would disappear through our fingers. … God is truth as long as He is the poetic truth people believe in with the kind of sincerity that is the essence and method of our will, which creates reality itself.[84]

Concluding considerations

The above engagement with modern physicists, philosophers and theologians reveals a shared trait in their fundamental views.

We can trace the overlap between the views of humanists and theologians. Poul Saxe emphasizes this while realizing that the follow up

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[82] Martin Buber, *Meetings*, La Salle, Ill. 1973, p. 53.

[83] See Leo Baeck, *God and Man in Judaism,* Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1958.

[84] Marcus Melchior, *Tænkt og talt* [Thought and Said], 1967, p. 242 and pp. 266-267.

question for humanists would be, "Where is salvation, then, and where the transcendent God?" He answers in the following way:

> Someone who denies the unambiguousness of life—and accepts the consequences—through "belief in God" and the salvation that is in "His hands;" still, God is the creator and humans, the created."[85]

To take a dialectical position implies taking seriously our unfathomable duality, that we are powerless in the face of the wonder of creation. Yet we still have to be willing and responsible. The dialectical view of life is—to the extent that it is consistent—both religious and ethical.

In contemporary thinking, we can trace connections back to two great traditions: the Greek-humanistic and the biblical. I do not mean to suggest that humanism and religion are moving toward harmony. That could only result in a compromise in which both would be distorted. What we glimpse is the beginning of a dialogue through which both views of life may be deepened—not only by reciprocal influences but also by the recognition that there is a dialectical relationship between the two views.

Many humanists are moving away from such one-sided monistic views as Freud's rationalistic concept of humanity as an entity that can be understood from one point of view, an entity that functions according to strict laws.

A number of theologians are moving away from the dualistic teaching that there is an absolute division between God and humans, where humans are seen as fundamentally powerless and sinful.

In both camps, there is a tendency to recognize that monistic as well as dualistic positions offend against reality—albeit from an unachievable search for logical coherence—and that we must think and act dialectically because of the insoluble paradox that permeates our existence.

We must accept the paradox that our view of life has to unite humanism, a belief in human ability and will, and humility, the recognition of our

[85] Poul Saxe, op. cit., pp. 191-192.

wretchedness and dependency. Our existence cannot be described by a single concept. Humans are both creator and created.

Or put differently, we are both cause and effect. We must recognize that we have free will but are also determined by causation. There is an incommensurable relationship between value and being (the good and the true), between a teleological and a causal worldview.

In ethics, we must find a fruitful dialogue between happiness ethics and duty ethics. A human being is part of nature, with an indomitable will to life, and a spiritual being, a creature who comes into being through interplay and causation.

We must recognize the complementarity between free expression and compliance with order—between dynamic life and causation.