

Twenty-three pieces on Self and Other

by Bart Nooteboom

6. Love

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The ancient Greeks distinguished between three types of love: *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

Eros is passionate and romantic love. It is exhilarating, exuberant, ecstatic, and propels one into unconditional commitment, to the point of blindness to imperfection. In one form, there is a myth of perfect unity, visualized as a perfect, egg-shaped, polished stone, which has broken into two jagged parts. The lover is one part and is on a quest to find his/her unique counterpart, to restore the perfect unity of seamless fit. That ideal is

somewhat difficult to reconcile with a different, modern urge to be autonomous and free to engage in careers and 'a life of one's own'. Yet this impossible combination is what glossy magazines lead people to expect if not demand: romantic, passionate love as well as autonomy.

Another form of *eros* is that the lover (typically a male) installs the loved one on a pedestal, pure and unattainable, and then goes out to slay dragons, conduct a crusade or work for a bank. The loved one is supposed to quietly worship her hero, sit still and demure, pining for his glorious return, and to gratefully receive whatever spoils he brings home. That also is difficult to combine with a woman's own identity, perspective and career. This love is possessive, domineering and is more about the self than about the loved one, more appropriation than giving or sharing.

Philia is usually translated as 'friendship' but it goes far beyond what is usually meant by that. It includes relations between parent and child, and even passionate love, but not in its romantic form, indicated above, of wanting to possess or merge. Characteristics of *philia* are reciprocal affection, mutual interest (in both senses), a sincere wish for the best for the other, empathy, a high degree of altruism (though that can never be expected to be unlimited), and mutual acceptance of independence. To help a true friend should be felt not as a duty but as an honour.

Agape is a more general benevolence towards others, not specific to unique persons. I may discuss that in a later item of this blog.

I would grant everyone the experience of *eros* at least once in life, but it is hardly sustainable in an ongoing relationship, and the best road to a happy life is *eros* that evolves into *philia*. But then, why not skip the turbulence and vicissitudes of *eros* and go straight to *philia*? That happens, but *eros* at the outset lends an enviable gloss of tenderness and depth of *philia*, if one manages the transition well, which is an art of life.

And we need *eros*, evolution needed it, to be blind to the risks and efforts of building commitment and to the imperfections of the partner until the commitment of give and take, the steps towards *philia*, have been made that make them acceptable.

46. Intolerance and altruism are instinctive

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My hypothesis is that there is an inclination towards intolerance, xenophobia and discrimination in our genes, and that it goes together with an instinct for altruism only within the group.

In evolution a striving for self-interest favours survival, so that is what evolution leaves in our genes. That egotism is tempered in case of family, since our genes can also be transmitted through them. A step further is that if people resemble us that may be an indication of genetic similarity. People who do not look like us, in appearance and conduct, are suspect.

Damasio reported that revulsion from the foreign is anchored in the brain centre where smell and taste are located. Originally, in evolution, that was a mechanism against ingesting poison. With this, the aversion to the foreign is accompanied not only by emotions of threat but also with feelings of contamination and poisoning.

One might think that loyalty and altruism are good for survival of the group and for that reason could be an outcome of evolution. Charles Darwin thought that. It has long been thought in evolutionary theory that this cannot be so, since potential properties lie in the genes of individuals, and groups have no genes. People with altruistic genes would be vulnerable to an invasion of egotists that prey on them, so that in time the altruists would be pushed out.

However, altruism can survive if in the group deviant, excessively egotistic conduct is identified and punished because a sufficient number of group members commit themselves to it, even if for it they need to bring sacrifices that go beyond their self-interest. Such victory over self-interest requires a strong emotional loading.

That can be derived from religion. From fear of death and human fragility people have an urge towards belief in a myth of immortality. That transcends the limitations of mortal, vulnerable existence, and causes the self to rise above itself. The emotional force of it is strong enough to make sacrifices for a higher cause. If, next, the only true God is that of the own group, then outgroup discrimination is supported by religion, and altruism within the group becomes viable at the price of mistrust of outsiders. There is internal cohesion at the price of external intolerance.

It can be different, with a constitutional state with the rule of law in which misuse of dependence and good faith is punished, and whose cost one is willing to share. Thus divine order can be replaced by the order of law as a source of solidarity.

But even then the instinct towards trust within and distrust outside the group still slumbers, and can be roused when the uncertainty of existence increases due to a crisis or trust in the constitutional state is undermined, with suspicions of failing integrity and abuse of power of police, judiciary or politics. That awakening of the instinct for intolerance and distrust can be fired with an appeal to religion, ideology and nationalism.

52. History of the self

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In his *Sources of the self*, Charles Taylor traces the appearance in history of what he called the 'disengaged self'. There are three forms of disengagement. First, disengagement of the soul from the body, and rationality from passions. Second, disengagement of the self from its natural and social environment. Third, disengagement from 'higher', transcendent values, in a denial of values that transcend individual human well-being.

After the classical views of Plato and Aristotle that the good and true lie outside the self, in universal ideas that we can try to grasp (Plato) or in forms to which life tends (Aristotle), the church father Augustine took a turn to the self as a source of inner light, generated by God, in which the self is transparent to itself, and which illuminates the path to God. The internal light is a gift from God and by turning inwards we reach God. We move, so to say, inward in order to turn outward.

With his turn inside Augustine can be seen as a precursor of Descartes but with the latter the self stays in itself, as a source of morality. Our capacity to reason construes both knowledge and morality, and is master of the passions. Here we see a double disengagement of self, from passions and from the world.

While in classical thought (Plato, Aristotle) rationality was substantive, i.e. referred to the making of good choices from a hierarchy of good things for a virtuous life, from Descartes on rationality increasingly becomes more procedural and instrumental, for the pursuit of optimal pleasure as the only good.

In humanism, emerging from the end of the 15th century, autonomy of the human being, in its capacity to form and give direction to its life, played a central role.

With the Reformation, around 1500, according to Taylor religion shifted from collective experience of being in the same boat, in which everyone had his place and where individual deviance jeopardized the salvation of all, to a direct personal relation to God and dedication to Him, without intervention by the church.

In contrast with the Augustinian view that love for the higher is granted us by the grace of God, Rousseau proposed that our inner nature is fundamentally good but, instead of the biblical fall, there is a perversion of this natural good by human culture. The root of evil lies in what others think and expect from us, and the pressure towards the satisfaction of pleasure. This turn of Rousseau deepens the look inside. Sentiments are no longer the movers of deeds for the good life but have intrinsic value as part of the good life. The realization of nature in us shows itself in the expression of feelings. The self, not the social, is the source of the self.

For Nietzsche, the self is not a given but something to be overcome and to be developed, created. There, even change of the self is up to the self.

53. Narcissism

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While in Romanticism (e.g. Rousseau) the self is seen positively as a source of the good, for Schopenhauer (1788-60) the self is the seat of an insatiable, uncontrollable, egotistic will to exist, possess and consume. It were better if we did not exist. One should try to escape from the self and its will in a Buddhist-like ascetic discipline. One can temporarily escape in art, in particular music, as a contemplation of the universal, from the will-driven individuality of the self.

By contrast, there is also a line of thought in literature (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Dostoyevsky) that wishes to accept darkness and depravity as part of the existential force of humanity that can manifest itself in a raw beauty. In philosophy we find this acceptance of humanity as it is, with all its passions, and the acceptance, even love of human fate ('amor fati') with Nietzsche.

Both Schopenhauer (2010) and Nietzsche (2006) emphasize the self-sufficiency of the self. They both make the distinction between pride, as the perception of self-worth based on one's own conviction, which they approve, and vanity, as the seeking of recognition of worth by others, which they despise. However, pride is based on the assumption that the conviction of self-worth is valid and free from delusion, while both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche themselves exhibit such delusion.

By this time we have strayed far from benevolence as part of a providential, God given nature, and we arrive at a demasking of benevolence as hypocritical and suppressive of human flourishing. Such honesty about human nature cannot simply be brushed aside in moral distaste. Nietzsche demands an answer, and later in this blog I will give it.

According to Lasch (1991) mentality has shifted from devotion to work as a contribution to both self-interest and the good of all to devotion to personal wealth and prosperity by achievement. Next it shifted to status and the winning of competitions with others as a goal in itself, a profiling of the self even without achievements, rhetoric above truth, opinions above arguments, glittering in public attention above grey, anonymous mediocrity. If one cannot achieve this by oneself, then in the reflection of the glitter of idols. This reflects yearning for a heroism that was lost in modernity.

Our culture has regressed into narcissism. Narcissism is not a synonym for egotism or selfishness, an excess of self, not a manifestation of personality but on the contrary a lack of self, a collapse of personality, an experience of inner emptiness and senselessness. That must then be filled with delusions of greatness that must be mirrored and confirmed in the environment, or by images of heroes to whom one mirrors oneself. Lasch (1991, p. 37) speaks of a 'sense of heightened self-esteem only by attaching himself to strong, admired figures whose acceptance he craves and by whom he needs to feel supported'. The inner voice of nature turned out not to have much to say. There turned out to be no sources of authenticity present.

Lasch ascribes narcissism to the inability to learn to live with one's shortcomings and with the fact that others don't only exist to satisfy one's wants. That shortfall increases as one sets one's ambitions higher, beyond one's limitations, regardless of the interests of others, to satisfy one's ambitions and longings. Advertising and other pressures to consume have contributed to this, with an appeal to a craving for luxuries, beauty, glitter, power, and selfrealization. He even ascribes our obsession with technology to a narcissistic urge to lift limitations in the satisfaction of longing and protection (Lasch 1991, p. 244).

According to Lasch (1991) we have strayed into widespread narcissism in which the self no longer has a self from itself but finds an emptiness in itself that it fills with delusions of superiority that it demands to see reflected and confirmed in its environment.

54. Self-interest?

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Economic thought has its roots in utilitarianism but along the way the insight has disappeared that the utilitarians (Bentham, J.S. Mill, Adam Smith) were oriented to the common good, and accepted that at times individual interest had to be sacrificed for the greater good of all. In economic thought the self has increasingly become disconnected from its environment and the common good.

Economists do recognize *enlightened self-interest*, defined as taking interests of others into account in so long as after the deduction of any sacrifice it yields net advantage. I define *altruism* as making a sacrifice even if, within limits, it yields net disadvantage. The motive for it can be love or morality, and it can be instinctive. In economics, altruism is almost always excluded. The argument for that is that under competition in markets altruists would not survive. However, competition is seldom so stark, or 'efficient', as economists call it, as to leave no room for any altruism (and for other inefficiencies). I do grant that altruism is limited by conditions of survival. The sharper competition is the less room there is for it.

It is standard practice in economics to refer, in assumptions of self-interest, to Adam Smith's argument of the 'invisible hand' (in his *Wealth of nations*), but Smith pointed out that selfinterest can go against collective interest and therefore must be subjected to constraints. He also (in his *Theory of moral sentiments*) gave arguments against the notion that compassion (he calls it 'sympathy') is in fact self-satisfaction and further says 'That whole account of human nature, however, which deduces all sentiment and affections to self-love, which has made so much noise in the world, but which, so far as I know, has never yet been fully and distinctly explained, seems to me to have arisen from confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy'. That 'noise' in economic thought has resounded far in politics and policy and has carried us away from good sense and from humanism. It has institutionalized egotism in society. Everything had to go via the market and that was seen as surrender to egotism. Erroneous notions in economic science have misled us. This is a scandal. I wish economists had read Smith better.

Earlier in this blog, in an item on freedom (item 47), I indicated that for the highest level of freedom, in determining what we find that we should want, we need others to coach us from our prejudice and misconceptions. Adam Smith (of all people) already said this: 'We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them'. Smith already recognized the need for the other. Again, I wish economists had read Smith better.

55. Self and other

published 17-11-2012

With this item I start a series on the theme of self and other. There, I will use bits and pieces from my book Beyond humanism: The flourishing of life, self and other (2012, PalgraveMacmillan). In the preceding series, on morality and ethics, I gave a prelude to this theme, in the history of the self, a discussion of individual and collective egotism, and of

narcissism. If those are rejected, how, then, could or should the relationship between self and other be? In the present item I outline the subjects to come.

In the series I will deviate from the focus on the autonomous, rational self that can shape its own future, which is characteristic of humanism, with its roots in the (radical) Enlightenment, to arrive at what I call *otherhumanism*, a transformed humanism that focuses more on the other. I will start with a characterization of humanism.

Next, I will proceed with a few practical considerations. First, I will consider the intellectual and economic value of the other for the self, and of *variety* of insights and opinions, in contrast with universalistic notions of equality and universality of ideas. Second, I will consider the need for stability versus *flexibility* of relationships, arguing for an optimal, not maximum flexibility. That is part of the overall theme of stability and change that appears and re-appears in this blog.

Next, I will delve into philosophy, with a discussion, first, of *Friedrich Nietzsche* as an outspoken philosopher of the self that strives to manifest and develop itself, in its will to power. The appeal of Nietzsche lies in his call for the flourishing of life. But for him concern for the other human being, benevolence form an obstruction. By contrast, I will then consider *Emmanuel Levinas*, an outspoken philosopher of the other. His appeal lies in call for transcendence of the self, liberation from the prison of the self by opening to the other. I will then try to find a path between those two extremes, in my proposal of otherhumanism.

How can one have a flourishing life and be a good person for others, without help from God and the threat of hell and the promise of heaven? The answer is simply that in order to have a flourishing life one needs others and one needs to have empathy for hem. I already gave an indication of that in a preceding item, on freedom (nr. 47).

Subsequently I will look more in detail into opportunities and problems of relationships and into how they may work and develop, in give and take, also under pressures of competition in the economy.

That leads on to an analysis of trust: what is it, on what is it based, what are its limits, and how does it develop. But that constitutes a theme in itself. .

56. Humanism

published 22-11-2012

One definition of humanism is that it takes principles for human action and life not from nature nor from the supernatural but from humanity itself.

There are varieties of humanism. The term was applied to a stream of intellectual activity in the Renaissance. The term ‘rebirth’ refers to a renewed inspiration from especially the Greek classics. Earlier, classical thought had already had a large influence. First that of Plato, especially in *neoplatonism* that was a major source of inspiration in Christian thought. Later, in the 13th century, Aristotelian thought, which had reached Western Europe via the moors in Spain, gave a new impulse to Christian thought, e.g. in the work of Thomas Aquinas. From the 14th century philosophy was no longer only a handmaiden to theology. Earlier, in the 11th

and 12th centuries, there was a development of cities, emergence of commerce and free professions, and a beginning of capitalism. That yielded a need for knowledge and contributed to the development of individualism and of science. In the 14th and 15th century disastrous failures, moral, political and military, notably in the 100 years war between England and France, of the church and the nobility, contributed to the long-term demise of those old authorities.

The early humanism of the 16th century, with Montaigne, Erasmus, Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, had two characteristic features. First, and above all, it was oriented towards the individual and its flourishing and freedom. It was not antireligious. Second, it had an Aristotelian appreciation of diversity, tolerance, change, intellectual modesty, individuality and context-dependence of judgement, with the intuition that human life does not lend itself to abstract generalization.

In the *Enlightenment*, the drive towards the freedom and flourishing of the individual, and criticism of suppressive authorities of state and church, acquired a new dynamic. Humanism acquired the connotation of a rejection of divine and other supernatural powers. The humanism of the Renaissance was criticized for its distortion of classical texts in subordination to convention and maintenance of Christian faith. In what some have called a *Counter-Renaissance* much of classical thought was rejected, such as the Aristotelian idea that processes in nature strive towards a goal (the *final cause*). There was a development of abstract thought, and especially English philosophers turned to empirical foundations of knowledge. The Aristotelian perspective of practical philosophy was replaced by a more Platonic one, in a striving for universal, immutable, context-independent truths, in *clear and distinct ideas* (Descartes) or *adequate ideas* (Spinoza). The Enlightenment was not, however, platonic in seeking the source of the true, the good and the beautiful outside the subject but sought it inside, and that became part of humanism.

Nowadays the most current meaning of ‘humanism’ is an attitude to life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, and belief in the betterment of the human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts. Also, everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and to have the opportunity for the flourishing and authenticity of the human being.

57. The value of difference

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Differences in knowledge, perception, emotion, feeling, views, ethics and culture, which I have called *cognitive distance* in my scientific work, are bothersome, because they are a source of misunderstanding and prejudice and make collaboration difficult. On the other hand they are also interesting as a source of learning. The challenge is to find partners with optimal difference: sufficient to be able to tell or show each other something new but not so much that one cannot understand each other or cannot deal with each other.

Empirical (econometric) research (that I did with associates) shows that such optimal difference yields economic advantage through improved performance in innovation. The ability to work together with people who think differently yields economic advantage. That

yields hope for diversity and tolerance, because if those were economically disadvantageous they would hardly be viable.

The ability to collaborate has a cognitive component in the narrow meaning of intellectual understanding (*absorptive capacity*), and a cognitive component in the wider, also affective sense of ethics and morality, of views on good and bad. One should not only understand each other but also have empathy for each other.

The complement of absorptive capacity, the other side of the coin, is the ability to help others understand one, with the use of illuminating examples or metaphors that help them to absorb one's thought into theirs. One can develop both types of ability, for absorption and for communication, by accumulating knowledge and experience in collaboration with people who think differently. This enables relationships at larger cognitive distance, offering a higher degree of learning and innovation. The positive effect of that has also been demonstrated in empirical research.

One can also make use of go-betweens that help to bridge cognitive distance, preventing or eliminating misunderstandings, clarify views and habits, and take away suspicion.

To the extent that relationships last longer and are exclusive, i.e. closed off from relationships with other, more distant parties, cognitive distance will in due course decline. One becomes so familiar with each other that one begins to see, think and act in the same way. That is convenient, in fast and easy agreement, but it can also yield intellectual incest and lack of learning and renewal. However, long lasting relationships can retain their cognitive vitality when parties also maintain relationships with different others that can feed the relationship with fresh ideas and perspectives.

In communities, the advantage of strong local connections is that they enable close cooperation, with social control, reputation effects and mutual trust, but they can also lead to rigidity and stagnation. Isolated, cohesive groups are in danger of losing the impulse of novel ideas and experience, and to prevent that from happening bridges should be built to connect with other groups. And for that one must overcome the inclination to distrust outsiders.

This analysis serves to give more substance to the claim from evolutionary theory of the economy (see item 30) that variety matters for innovation. Variety is not only needed for selection to work, but also to generate novelty and produce new variety.

60. Nietzsche's error

published 1-12-2012

I endorse Nietzsche's passionate plea for an affirmation of life, in the flourishing of the creative and intelligent force of the human being, and transcendence of the self as the highest expression of the *will to power*. However, this path is blocked by his overestimation of the self and his condemnation of morality.

In his *Genealogy of morality* Nietzsche reconstructed the morality of compassion, altruism and self-sacrifice as a revolt of the weak ('slaves') in their resentment against the strong

(‘masters’). With the power of the majority, the slaves have appropriated morality, in an alliance with religion, in an exercise of their own will to power. Individual will to power of ‘the strong’ is curtailed by external forces of custom, law and punishment, and thus restrained it turns upon the self, to overwhelm it and to torture it in self-denial. The result is suffocation of the forces of self-realization. The shame that this brings about is diverted to a feeling of virtue in the claim that self-sacrifice is a sacrifice for the sake of a higher religious purpose.

Benevolence is particularly perverse when it turns into pity, which is demeaning to both the subject and the object of pity. It is often an expression of the will to power, in a revenge on the weak, in further degrading the weak, in elevating oneself above the object of pity, and imposing the demand of gratitude and obedience, and inviting applause. For the object of pity the feeling that he has a right to pity deflects attention from his weakness and efforts to overcome it. While in contrast with pity compassion may be genuine, with a concern for the dignity of its object, that still undermines the potential of the strong, detracts from the realization of his potential and negates life.

At a few places, Nietzsche recognizes that the self needs the opposition of others, friends and foes, to escape from illusions of the self (in *Human all too human*). He makes allowance for altruism between friends who may sufficiently know each other to achieve empathy. This is accompanied, however, by an equilibrium of power. He also allows for benevolence from the master to his slave, in a spontaneous overflow from the bounty of his supremacy. However, these points are swamped by an avalanche of diatribe against compassion, altruism and orientation towards the other. In the preface to his *Genealogy of morality* Nietzsche says that the ‘regard outside, instead of back to the self, is part of slave morality. The real, noble spirit seeks opposition only in order to say yes to himself even more gratefully, with more alacrity’.

The error in this is the following. As I have argued in preceding items of this blog, and will argue further in later items, for transcendence of the self the self needs the other to oppose it, to correct its prejudice and errors, and to extend its mental and spiritual scope. And for that to work one must become a master in empathy and compassion.

61. Levinas: philosophy of the other

published 5-12-2012

From the traditional centrality of the self in Western philosophy it is difficult to find a foundation for benevolence or altruism. Emmanuel Levinas turns it around: the ethical call for benevolence is primary, precedes the self and all consideration of self-interest, and protection of one’s interests is a compromise on that. One can and in conditions of real life in society inevitably does compromise on the ethical call, but the call remains valid to maintain an ideal of conduct that we should not forget.

For Levinas the feeling of responsibility for the other is not a rational choice but something that happens to you and that you experience as being chosen or ‘elected’ and that makes you unique, irreplaceable for the unique other. The ethical call is to surrender to the other, and to suffer from his suffering, an imperative that precedes all other consideration. Levinas speaks of giving oneself as a ‘hostage’. With this he means that the self becomes ‘victim without

being guilty'. Responsibility and dedication to the other go so far that they apply also when the other obstructs or even persecutes one.

In the earlier work of Levinas (*Totality and the infinite*, 1987), to which I limit myself here, the self is, in first instance, tied to itself, which is in due course experienced as frightening, oppressive, or generates boredom, and evokes an urge to escape. 'Evasion' he calls that in one of his earliest works (1982). In his novel *More die of heartbreak* Saul Bellow speaks of the 'claustrophobia of consciousness'. The self needs the other to escape from himself not only for cognitive reasons, as I have emphasized earlier in this blog, but also for emotional, spiritual reasons. The opening to the other is, in other words, not only a search but also a flight.

Levinas concludes that the flight from the self requires that we must not judge or approach the other from the perspective of our existing views. If we do that we never get away and beyond our present self. As long as one takes oneself as point of departure in the approach to the other we remain locked up in ourselves. We must be open to the other without evaluating or judging in advance and without the pretension to ever completely grasp the other.

Levinas says that this opening is not 'receptivity', in which one remains as one is while receiving the other. We require what Levinas calls 'passiveness': one should not determine the terms but surrender to the terms of the other. Levinas uses a metaphor of breathing, and letting oneself be literally inspired (breathed into) by the other. Breathing also is not based on a choice on the basis of an evaluation of what it will yield. It is something you undergo. That is the spirit in which one should set oneself aside.

65. Otherhumanism

published 15-12-2012

Traditional western humanism is focused on the self. I turn to another humanism that is oriented more towards the other, which I call *otherhumanism*. In this blog I developed arguments for it and I now bring them together.

In item 49 on freedom I argued that the self needs others to achieve the highest possible level of freedom: the freedom to escape from the prejudices of the self about what it should want.

In item 57 I argued that there is more or less *cognitive distance* between people, and that this difference yields a problem, in lack of mutual understanding, but also an opportunity for learning. If objective knowledge is impossible then testing our insights on what 'others have made of it' is the only chance we have to correct our errors.

In item 31 I summarized a cycle of invention in which application of existing knowledge and competence to novel contexts, with new challenges and opportunities, can lead to new knowledge and competence. In item 58 that insight was applied for a deeper insight into how communication, by fitting each other's different insights into each other's cognitive structures can lead to their transformation. That yields deeper insight into the importance of the other for learning by the self.

In language, there is Wittgenstein's argument of the impossibility of a private language. The self needs the other to establish meaning and for making sense. In item 37 on the change of meaning I applied the theory of invention to change of meaning. Universals derive their meaning from specific cases and as abstractions from them are only temporary, forming a platform for application in novel contexts by which universals and their meanings shift.

In item 60 I discussed Nietzsche's (mostly implicit) assumption that the self can rise above itself without the need for any other. In item 61 I discussed Levinas, as a polar opposite to Nietzsche, in recognition of the need of the self to open up to the other as a source of transcendence.

In sum, my argument for otherhumanism is as follows. Any hereafter as life after death is an illusion. The hereafter is not you yourself but the people and their environment that you leave behind. If you want to make your life worthwhile and dedicate yourself to the hereafter then the only way is dedication to others and to the society of the future. Dedication to others is not at the expense of yourself and life. The self needs others to escape from illusory certainties as well as doubt, to achieve the highest possible level of freedom, to achieve its potential, to develop and transcend itself, and thereby to utilize the unique gift of life.

This leads to a notion of the flourishing of life that goes beyond the life of the self, not in a claim to any absolute, universal good beyond the world, but in participation and contribution to the flourishing of others, during and after our life.

The views and analyses that I present in this blog are perhaps more congenial with Eastern, in particular Chinese, philosophy than with Western philosophy. Later, in a sequel to the present blog, I will consider that in some detail. For the moment, let me just give a few indications. My *otherhumanism* seems close to the *social humanism* of Confucius, with its perspective of benevolence (although I do not much like the importance assigned to propriety, ritual and respect for authority). In Buddhism and in Chinese philosophy I find interest in change and impermanence, in different ways, which is congenial to my *imperfection on the move*. The Chinese notions of *yin* and *yang*, and later developments in neo-Confucianism (e.g. in the notions of *opening and closing* in the philosophy of Xiang Shili) seem to have some resemblance to my *cycle of invention*. There is a strong tradition of integrating thought and action, which is congenial to the *pragmatism* that I preach and practice.

66. The value of collaboration

published 19-12-2012

In preceding items I indicated the cognitive, ethical and spiritual value of collaboration. Here I go into its economic value. Contrary to common opinion, markets are not only about competition but also about collaboration. Conversely, collaboration is seldom free from rivalry and tension of conflicting interests. Here I discuss the advantages, in the following item the problems of collaboration.

Organizations, including firms, must have some *focus* of knowledge, competence, purpose, and governance (as I discussed in my book *A cognitive theory of the firm*, 2009). One should not aim to do everything. The task of organizations is to achieve efficiency in performing a set

of specific tasks. For that, one cannot afford, to have to learn to understand each other, negotiate goals and procedures at every step. Some things need to be taken for granted. As a result, cognitive distance within organizations must be limited. However, that yields a form of myopia. To avoid that, in order to identify all relevant threats and opportunities, especially for innovation organizations need collaborative relationships with other organizations at a larger cognitive distance, to repair their myopia, in complementary cognition.

However, between organizations that need each other, in complementary cognition, mutual understanding and adjustment needs to be built, and as discussed in items 57 and 59 that requires so-called *relation specific investments* that require some minimum duration of the relationship to be recouped. Therefore I argued for optimal, not maximum flexibility of relationships. As a result, partners become mutually dependent, and a system of governance is required to deal with it, and that must be a system of give and take, acceptance of difference, and empathy for each other's position and problems.

All this is far from the usual rhetoric of competition in markets that demands that one take every bit of advantage from others that one can. Rather than ensuring one's survival it can jeopardize it. This does not mean that there is no competition, but that a trade off should be made between one's own advantage available in isolation and one's share in a greater advantage achieved in collaboration. Admittedly, the latter requires give and take, and reciprocity, which entails that at times one gives more than one takes, and when competition is so fierce that in order to survive one cannot afford that even for a moment, then indeed this type of collaboration becomes impossible.

However, competition is seldom so fierce. Especially when collaboration yields specialty products with high profit margins that competitors find it difficult to replace. That reduces competitive pressure, allowing for the give and take of collaboration to take place.

That has consequences for prosperity. The usual argument for markets is that competition enforces maximum efficiency. But the other side of the coin is that it excludes the collaboration that is needed for innovation. Since so much emphasis is now laid on innovation the option of collaboration may contribute most to prosperity.

76. How much community?

published 26-1-2013

From previous items in this blog I can now piece together my answer to Charles Taylor's question: How much community should a democracy have?

I agree with him and with (other) communitarian philosophers, that a liberal society that ensures only *negative freedom*, in minimal interference with individual action, is not enough. As I argued in item 43, on *justice*, I go along with Martha Nussbaum's notion of *capabilities*: society should also provide *positive freedom* in ensuring minimal access to such capabilities.

In view of the discussion of *immorality of groups* (item 48), such as recently appeared among bankers, who allow themselves to be caught in prisoners dilemma's of antisocial behaviour, society should actively restrict their freedom to do so.

But do we, going beyond that, require a shared definition of the good life? Next to laws that aim to ensure negative and positive freedom, should there be a shared ethic, in a shared culture? In item 10, on culture, I declared myself against the notion of some *essence* in culture, and pleaded for more or less shared or overlapping elements of culture.

I am afraid, and so is Taylor, of anything that might end up in something like Rousseau's *general will* to which people must conform and submit. History has demonstrated, in communism for example, how that can lead to totalitarianism.

I do subscribe to a set of shared values, which are not necessarily universal in that they depend on historical conditions and priorities of time and place. Presently what we need is shared values of tolerance, appreciation of diversity, taking responsibility for one's actions and for society, loyalty to collective interests of society, a modicum of altruism (depending on pressures of survival), and openness to discussion and exchange of ideas between individuals and cultures. These values do not constitute any essence of any single culture but fortunately are shared more or less between different cultures.

The underlying philosophy that I developed in this blog is that people are not autonomous, are limitedly rational, and do not have any given, unitary identity that is to be revealed in 'authentic expression'. People develop their identity in interaction with other people. Within constraints laid down by the potential embodied in one's genes and constraints in outside conditions of development, one can develop one's self. The crucial point is that for this one needs a basis of shared language and ethics, indicated above, as well as opposition from the other person and other culture. Those yield potential for development of the self because they are different. Even if one is only self-interested one needs the other for the self to develop and to be free also from one's own moral prejudice, but for that to work one must be open, empathetic and committed to trustworthiness.

Fortunately, the ability to 'cross cognitive distance' to others who think differently is also economically advantageous, in favouring innovation (see items 57 and 58).

This opens up the need to develop attitudes and skills of collaboration and trust, which are not only desirable but also viable. See the foregoing items on trust (68-75).

108. The self as work in progress

published 26-8-2013

Heidegger is said to have abolished the *spectator theory* of the subject, the self as autonomous, disconnected and looking at the world from outside. Instead, the self is involved in the world, and is constituted by actions in that world. Thought and action interact. I discussed this before in this blog, in item 40, on *being in the world*.

The rejection of spectator theory arises also in pragmatist philosophy, as in the work of George Herbert Mead, with the idea of the self as constituted by interaction with others in the world.

This is part of a wider shift of thought from a static view of the self, with a given mind and body, a given identity or authentic self, to a dynamic view of the self as work in progress. This is found also in the thought of Nietzsche and of Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard described the self as ‘a relation that is itself related to itself’. I understand this in terms of the idea of *embodied cognition* that I discussed in the items on cognition (23-29). The brain constructs representations of the body, which yield a feeling of coherence of the self, and representations of the world, and higher level representations of representations, on different levels of cognition. On some level, representations of representations may constitute self-consciousness.

The idea of the self as work in progress, in being in the world, in existence, forms the crux of *existentialism*, of which Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger are seen as the fathers.

As I discussed in a preceding item on Wittgenstein (item 105), meanings of words get established in their use in practice, yielding *language games* with their rules of legitimate usage.

The idea was carried further by Michel Foucault, who analysed how legitimate meanings and conversations get established in practices that reflect the interests and positions of persons or institutions in control. See his studies of prisons, health care and education.

This leads to a view of the human being as caught in the power of institutionalized discourse that eliminates freedom, in a suppression to which those subjected themselves contribute, in their tacit acceptance or inevitable entanglement in the language games to which they are brought up to submit. This suppressive power is all the more sinister for its being hidden in what is taken for granted, in the tacit rules of the language game, to the point that what is in fact submission is seen not only as well intended but as beneficial.

As I discussed in item 50, towards the end of his life Foucault tried to find a way for the individual to break out by ‘turning its life into a work of art’. That is what rebelling intellectuals and artists do, and entrepreneurs (as I indicated in item 41). They try to create a new game but thereby break the rules of established games and suffer for it.

In item 107 I proposed that hope turns into despair, and loss of trust, when one gets trapped in conditions one can neither choose nor influence, in established systems and corresponding language games. Kierkegaard proposed that we can only escape from despair by surrendering to God. Rebellious intellectuals, artists and entrepreneurs find other ways to create new hope.

121. From eros to philia

published 24-11-2013

Earlier in this blog (item 6) I discussed romantic love (*eros*) in contrast with loving friendship (*philia*). Romantic love is utopian, reaching for an unattainable ideal outside reality, and tends to be possessive, appropriating the loved one.

As an outflow of the Enlightenment, in modern society our self-image is that we make our choices in freedom, as a rational, autonomous being. But in love we are about to surrender our

autonomy and freedom, constraints on our actions. That step is difficult to reconcile with rational autonomy.

Romantic love is needed to cause blindness, initially, to the imperfections of the loved one, in order to be prepared to take the leap into the hazardous adventure of love. But how can a possessive, self-oriented, obsessive eros next develop into the openness and reciprocity of philia?

Freud had more to say on this issue. Eros entails dependence and a risk of loss, of sinking a deep emotional investment without receiving equally intense love in return, or of losing the loved one. This fearful dependence can yield suspicion, lack of trust. The lover anticipates unrequited love, and is on the lookout for signs of it, twisting perception to confirm the fear. It can yield hate. The urge to appropriate the loved one is an attempt to maintain control, to eliminate dependence and risk of loss. Of course all this only antagonizes the loved one and threatens to fulfil the fearsome risk of a lost love and of desertion, in a mutual escalation of fear and mistrust. The greater the passion the greater the risk, possible suspicion and hate, and the hazard of breakdown.

The perversity of perfect passion especially tempts the adolescent, with its dream of purity and perfection, in disdain of adult cowardice and compromise.

Could it be the other way around: start with philia rather than eros? Is there a way to develop acquaintance and familiarity first and release the passion of eros later? As described by Eva Illouz, in her book 'Why love hurts', that is what we had in the past, in social rules and rituals of acquaintance and engagement prior to commitment. Presently, love has to be immediate and 'authentic', preferably in love at first sight. I would not want to go back to former social and ritualistic strictures that locked up love in class endogamy, but how, then, can we proceed?

The challenge is to learn not only to recognize but also to accept, and next even to cherish, the quirks and imperfections of the loved one, in what Eva Illouz called *incremental reciprocity*. Here again we find *imperfection on the move*. Learning to trust and shed suspicion. To give space to the loved one, not to appropriate. Not to jump to dark interpretations of innocuous conduct. To learn to talk about it, and to hear the other out. To count to ten. To extend benefit of the doubt, to allow for errors of interpretation and for mistakes of judgement or perception of the partner. In other words: to exercise *voice*, as discussed in the items on trust in this blog (items 68 to 74). That, I propose, is the maturity of love.

Next to the *negative freedom* of being free from constraints, there is *positive freedom* of having access to new sources for fulfilment or development of the self, to be discovered in a process of incremental reciprocity. While the leap of eros limits freedom in the negative sense, it can enable positive freedom, in the building up of philia.

In the preceding item in this blog, concerning love relationships, I argued for a certain channeling or re-direction of passion (eros) to allow for the build-up of loving friendship (philia). I did not mean to imply that emotion should be replaced by rational evaluation.

Eva Illouz, in her book 'Why love hurts' (2012), analyzed modern conditions of love and commitment. She found that rational evaluation of multiple alternatives, which have increasingly arisen in modern times, after the suspension of constraints of class, education, standing, income, procedures and ritual, and multiple dimensions of choice, of appearance, spirit, life style, interests and abilities, can have an adverse effect.

Rational evaluation is typically analytic, decomposing objects of choice into different characteristics and weighting them to arrive at some composite measure for comparison of alternative options. Illouz employed a variety of outcomes from research that show that this procedure can have adverse effects.

It has long been known that often choice is best left up to intuition. While rational choice is analytic, intuition is more integrative, employing tacit knowledge built up from experience, which by definition escapes rational grasp. Tapping from various research, Illouz further analyses this as follows. 'Decomposing an object into components diminishes the emotional force of a decision' (p. 93), and causes people to 'moderate their evaluations' and to lower emotional quality'. commitment ultimately is the strongest because commitment cannot be a rational choice' (p. 96).

It is not a matter of dotting all the I's and crossing all the t's of rational choice and solving all problems before a commitment is made. At some point an emotional commitment needs to be made, to close issues of choice and as a basis for solving problems.

In sum, the emotional sweep of eros is still needed to leap into commitment, as a start, for next developing philia. So what does this do to my analysis in the preceding item in this blog? In a rational analysis of alternatives, there is a consideration of *opportunity costs* (as the economist calls it): of the value of options not chosen, in an anticipation of regret, which lowers the value of whatever one does choose. It produces ambivalence in choice.

Illouz reports research that shows that cohabitation before marriage, as a 'try-out', increases the risk of divorce and lowers the quality of marital satisfaction. Ongoing analysis and comparison of value drives out commitment. She concludes that '.. the affective dimension of On the one hand the furor of eros should be tempered, in eliminating its possessiveness and its fear and suspicion of loss or dependence, and on the other hand it is needed to clinch the issue of commitment, in preserving the emotional craving to be with the loved one and to keep him/her, and no-one else, as a basis for philia to develop.

What is wrong with modernity is that eros has been reduced to sex and rational choice has replaced commitment.

If you have the urge to aspire to perfection, and to feel special, significant, essential in life, does that make you a narcissist, or only if you need to be admired, celebrated for it? However that may be, how does one satisfy that urge?

Patricia de Martelaere saw three ways: art, love and God. The problem with God is that he does not answer or speak, and you cannot be sure he really exists and loves you. The problem with romantic love (*eros*) is that the loved one may cease to love you or may desert you. Art has the advantage that it is under your own control, if you have the talent for it. Unfortunately, the price you pay is that it is dead, not alive by itself. Yet for control freaks, seeking to achieve an essential life without risk, that may be the way. Perhaps that is why often artists (and philosophers) wind up alone, avoiding the risks of love.

Foucault, at the end of his struggle with pervasive and all-invasive powers of social structures, sought a way out in turning one's life into a work of art. How could that go?

De Martelaere said that death does not fulfil life but interrupts it, prevents one from rounding it off as a finished product, and that to foil death an artist (and, I would add, also an intellectual, scientist or entrepreneur) seeks to achieve a finished work, after which one can say: I achieved that before death could snatch it away.

How could this be related to the *imperfection on the move* that I advocate in this blog, and the idea that the only life after death is the life of others that one leaves behind?

For the artist (or intellectual, scientist, entrepreneur), after finishing a project there is always the next one to engage upon, which may not get finished and in any case is only a step in an ongoing series that will certainly never be finished.

Suppose one sees one's life not as a series of projects for oneself but as a contribution to an ongoing stream of life, where one's projects contribute to those of others to come. Then, may not the urge to feel essential in life be satisfied by making essential contributions to what may come, to the potential after life? But how does one know whether one's contribution is essential? That also is up to posterity to decide. All one can do is to strive for it to the best of one's capability and insight.

That is also what parents, especially mothers perhaps, do, in bringing up children as a project without end, contributing to the potential of posterity. And how about workers in health care, say? In their way they can feel essential in life.

In both Western and Eastern philosophy there is a tendency to reserve enlightenment for an elite of the initiated, the illuminated, the trained, the ascetic, in gaining access to a transcendent, elevated, absolute, supreme being (God, Brahman) or condition (Nirvana). If one renounces absolutes and embraces imperfection on the move, one can achieve freedom from self-obsession in ordinary life, in transcendence that is horizontal, in others, and immanent, during life.

It is a common thought that promises and commitments require a self that is constant, being in future what it is now and wanting what it wants now. I find that a suffocating notion of self and other. In my view, commitment is aimed at ongoing interaction with someone for mutual growth, mentally, spiritually or economically. Some stability of relationship is required to utilize its potential, but not fixity of self.

According to Buddhism and David Hume, who appears to have been inspired by Buddhism, the self is an illusion that results from misguided thinking in terms of substance. There is only a flux of momentary perceptions, thoughts and feelings without a self. There is as little underlying substance behind 'I think' as in the phrase 'it rains'. Montaigne also had this insight.

In Buddhism one can surrender the illusion of self in intense, disciplined meditation, freeing oneself from the miseries of life that follow from the thirst and cravings of the self, in peace of mind and feeling at one with the world, in *Nirwana*. Here, there is a parallel to Schopenhauers notion of the will to life as the source of all misery.

In eastern philosophy there is also a stream, but not a dominant one, that does not surrender but seeks the individual self (*purusha*) but that was static, eternal, and autonomous.

While I accept that the self is not unitary but fragmented into multiple, shifting aspects of self, and is 'on the move', constructed and reconstructed in experience, I do think there still is a workable notion of identity, as I discussed in item 8 of this blog. If we surrender all notions of the self, how can we, indeed, still talk of intentions and agency? What remains of character? The self is the seat of action in the world, and we live to employ it in that way.

For Kierkegaard also, as for me, the self is not a compound but a process, in a dialectic of inside and outside. He said: the self is a relation that relates itself to its own self. That may sound mystifying, but I think it is exactly right. It can be explained if we turn to Damasio's account, discussed in item 8 of this blog, and repeated here, as follows. The brain forms images or 'maps', in neuronal structures, of the interior body, of organs. Those internal images in the brain are fed by the physiology of organs, and in turn play a role in the regulation of those organs. Next, from observation of external objects and experience with actions those body maps are affected, and a new level of images or maps arises. Here, from interaction with the outside world the notion arises of the self as an independent player in that world. Next that leads to the build-up of a biographical self, with memories of earlier experiences, and expectations and plans for the future, and the whole of all that forms the identity of the self.

In my argument for *otherhumanism* I did plead for *kenosis* or 'emptying the self', in the sense of opening up to the other human being, in empathy and benevolence, and inviting its opposition. But I pleaded for that not to lose the self but to enhance its flourishing.

The self needs the other to free itself from its prejudices and to grow, intellectually and spiritually, on the basis of opposition from the other to which one must learn to open up, in

empathy. I argued that this even yields economic advantage by utilizing differences between people to create innovation by *novel combinations*.

205. Parochial altruism

published 6-7-2015

Empirically, altruism has clearly been shown to exist, in people and animals, especially certain primates. In particular the Bonobo ape, as Frans de Waal has shown.ⁱ It appears to be present naturally, instinctively.

De Waal makes the point that if altruism were against human nature, had nothing to build on there, the task of morality to impose it would be impossible.

In item 46 of this blog I considered the puzzle of how altruism could have survived evolution as an instinct, i.e. as ‘something in our genes’, next to an instinct for self-interest and survival. I offered an argument for the hypothesis that it could have survived only when accompanied with some protection of an altruistic group against invasion of opportunistic outsiders that derive advantage from preying on altruists and competing them away in evolutionary selection.

In other words, by hypothesis altruism is accompanied by an instinctive discrimination of outsiders. Perhaps that explains current xenophobia, in Europe, against non-western immigrants. I also suggested that by cultural means altruism concerning members of the group one identifies with may be extended, moulded, to include outsiders. Ethics may then build on a genetic potential for empathy.

I did not offer empirical evidence, and here I proceed to do so.

In a mountain of literature, in psychology and sociology, the proposition is known as *parochial altruism*, and it has been extensively confirmed empirically, but with an important qualification.ⁱⁱ There is more weight on in-group love and preferential treatment than on outgroup hatred. This may make raise some hope against xenophobia.

Not surprisingly, in-group preferential treatment is stronger to the extent that collaboration is more important, reputation effects are stronger, and inter-group competition is stronger. More surprisingly, perhaps, it has also been found to be stronger for more other-oriented or ‘prosocial’ individuals. One might have expected that they would be more benevolent towards outsiders, but that appears not to be the case. In other words, a stronger other-orientation does not reduce but intensifies out-group discrimination.

Carsten de Dreu et al.ⁱⁱⁱ investigated the effect of the ‘love’ or ‘cuddle’ hormone Oxytocin. Here also one might have expected it to reduce out-group discrimination, but the opposite appears to be the case: it intensifies in-group favouritism, between-group rivalry and discrimination.

In his studies of apes, de Waal also found empathy within the group accompanied by distrust of any outsiders.

However, while Chimpanzees are indeed mistrustful and aggressive to outsiders, Bonobos are not. Instead of war they make abundant sexual love with outsiders, as they do within the group, thus avoiding tensions and conflict between in-group and out-group.

De Waal also argues that humans have traits in common with both Chimpanzees and Bonobos, related to our having a common ancestor to them. Perhaps in our stance towards immigrants we should cultivate the Bonobo in us. Perhaps culture could do that.

209. Identity and altruism in networks

published 27-7-2015

There are two reasons why it may be useful to employ concepts from network theory. One is to further analyse the notions of bonding and bridging capital mentioned in the preceding item in this blog. A second is that it may be useful to consider identity in terms of networks, as I suggested earlier (in item 10 of this blog).

Personal identity is then associated with *positions* in networks, and *cultural identity* with the *structure* of networks.

A central feature of *position* is *centrality*. There are different types. One is *degree centrality*, defined as the number of direct ties one has. This yields power of influence. It yields *preferential attachment*: the more direct connections one has the more attractive one is as a contact, and the more new connections one gets. This is a *Matthew effect*: the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer. That is one form of the *winner takes all* phenomenon that I discussed in item 203.

Betweenness centrality is the extent that one sits on an intersection of paths between distant points (*nodes*) in the network. This yields power of intermediation or brokerage.

The *strength* of a tie has several dimensions: duration, dependence (which can be one-sided), investment in the tie, trust, and the number of activities involved in the tie

A central feature of network *structure* is of course the *number of nodes*. A second feature is the *density* of the network: the number of direct ties between nodes. If density is complete, every node has a direct tie to every other node. Then all nodes have equal, maximum degree centrality.

Now what would one prefer: dense, strong ties, or sparse, weak ones? Perhaps one's intuition favours the first. And indeed: many direct ties yield access to many resources, and strong mutual dependence and trust yield stability.

However, there is the famous claim (proposed by Mark Granovetter) of the *strength of weak ties*: high density of the network, high centrality of position, and strong ties also carry disadvantages. They may tie one down, burdening capacity to deal with ties and limiting flexibility.

Communities with dense and strong internal ties, and few ties with other communities, would most exhibit the *parochial altruism* discussed in preceding items. Personal identity then is also strongly tied to group identity.

Economically, this yields a danger of stagnation, due to a lack of variety. Over time, with strong ties *cognitive distance* will become small, and members have little novelty to share. For novelty, there should be newcomers to the community, or there should be outside ties. That requires a limitation of the parochiality of altruism.

Structural holes are gaps in network structure: batches of nodes that are internally but not mutually connected. A special case is the *small worlds structure*, clusters with high density of strong internal ties and only few and weak ties between them. Ties between these batches require and stimulate altruism going beyond the parish. The internal ties yield bonding capital and the external ties yield bridging capital.

Those structures are ideal, both politically and economically. They yield internal cohesion of a community, with a large degree of trust, allowing for limited contracts, yielding low costs of contact and room for informality and improvisation. At the same time, economically, external ties yield impulses of variety to create novelty, and the diffusion and hence utilization of novelty. Politically, the internal ties allow for communal democracy, and the external ties yield a basis for the political scale advantages of integration discussed in item 207.

Perhaps this should be the model for the EU.

233. Constructive alienation

published 18-12-2015

The notion of alienation is best known from the work of Marx. It mostly has a negative connotation of not being able to express and be oneself, and to be accepted, in work or communication. This has three elements.

First, not getting the opportunity to express oneself. Second, not being heard or understood. Third, not being accepted for what one claims to be.

Concerning the third, whatever one claims to be, to deserve in position and recognition, is to be ratified by whatever categories apply in the established 'symbolic order' (to use that term from Lacan and Zizek). One may claim to be a philosopher but this is recognized only when one has a degree in that field or publications that have been well received professionally or by the wider public. Zizek called such lack of recognition and legitimation a 'second death', a symbolic death, next to physical death of the body.

Here, alienation is that 'I am not perceived or credited to be what I feel I am'. On one extreme, as an outsider one may hardly be recognised at all, hardly have symbolic presence. On another extreme, as a celebrity one may have too much symbolic presence, distorting what I feel I am.

However, perfect expression, being fully and faithfully present in the symbolic order, could apply only if one assumes that there is a given, coherent, unified, original self to be expressed.

In philosophy since David Hume, later also in Marx, and in postmodern philosophy, that notion of the subject is waived. The subject is seen as multiple, often incoherent, sometimes even inconsistent, and in flux. It is constituted by action and communicative interaction, from response from others. Thus imperfection of expression is inherently problematic because there is no autonomous self to express. Nevertheless, imperfect expression is still a cause of feeling forlorn.

Alienation, not being fully understood and accepted, is the price one pays for having an identity. One cannot have an identity without some degree of difference or distance to others.

Alienation is also inherent in the constitution of the self. This was recognized by Marx, and is called 'constitutive alienation'. As I have argued in this blog, one needs opposition from the other to develop a self, to have any chance of correcting one's myopia and prejudice, to gain freedom from it. Imperfect expression may call forth correction or enrichment by the response from others. It then becomes imperfection on the move, in the ongoing making of the self.

In preceding items in this blog I discussed Alfred Hirschman's notions of 'voice', 'exit' and 'loyalty'. Voice is needed to maintain and repair relationships when they run into trouble, as they mostly do, rather than fleeing from them, in exit. In the present analysis, voice assumes a deeper value, as constitutive of the self.

Then, the issue is not so much an issue of autonomy, the opportunity to express a given self, but of automorphism, the opportunity to form the self.

Of course, this requires attention from others, not just to listen to what one has to say, but being open to it, even if it sounds eccentric, giving it the benefit of the doubt, and next also to oppose or correct it, not only allowing for expression but also yielding impression. One not only needs to join but also to have a rejoinder. This appears to be increasingly lacking in large areas of modern work, due to increased flexibilization, as I discussed earlier, in item 211 of this blog. Perhaps this resembles what Marx called the 'commodification of work'.

So, by constructive alienation I mean two things: alienation as a basis for construction of the self, and alienation from the sources of such construction. If one is robbed of opportunities for the dialectic of expression and construction one is alienated from construction.

That occurs when after sending a message one receives no evidence that it has been read, or when there is no response, no rejoinder. This happens often in communication via the Internet. Sending a message is a bid for symbolic recognition, and lack of response yields alienation. For lack of response one is also alienated from the sources of the construction of the self. Thus, proliferation of messaging yields proliferation of alienation. We call this the communication revolution.

315. What effects do heuristics have on relationships?

What are the implications for relationships of the various decision heuristics found in social psychology?

According to the ‘availability heuristic’, what carries an emotional load, in threat or opportunity, for example, gets more attention (is more ‘available’) than emotionally less pronounced but often equally or more important issues. Concerning the stability of relationships, that can go in both directions. A relationship can depend on direct and strong emotions of love, attention, intimacy, tenderness, etc. But it can also fall apart in ravages of anger, jealousy, frustration, or spite. Quieter virtues of attention, intimacy, patience, tolerance, and empathy may better serve relationships but are often overruled.

The heuristic of ‘representativeness’ entails overhasty generalisations, raising incidents to lawlike regularities. ‘You always with your’ That seems mostly detrimental for the stability of relationships. One should learn to ‘count to ten’.

The heuristic of ‘loss aversion’ yields more extreme actions to prevent a loss than to achieve a gain. That is stabilizing, since relationships often break when one party sees a gain in getting out while the other sees that as a loss and wants him/her to stay. The heuristic would mean that the first demurs for fear of the second’s wrath and radical action. That is loyalty, though not an eager one.

According to the heuristic of ‘anchoring and adjustment’, one stays with given initial conditions, no matter how dysfunctional or inappropriate those may be, to engage only in marginal improvements, while it would have been better to make a clean break for something very different. That will clearly stabilize a non-ideal relationship.

According to the heuristic of ‘escalation of commitment’ one sticks to a commitment in spite of losses because otherwise those losses would ‘have been in vain’. That is clearly stabilizing.

In ‘cognitive dissonance’, after a choice is made one pays attention only to positive evidence that confirms the choice. That is also clearly stabilizing.

In sum, the heuristics are mostly stabilizing. One wonders whether that may not be coincidental. Might this have developed in evolution, as an instinct that favours the survival of relationships, and especially of the offspring?

Earlier in this blog I offered the hypothesis (it is no more than that) that the heuristics that now are irrational may have made sense in a far past, in evolution, for the sake of survival. Here is another argument for that.

321. Adaptiveness

published 24-6-2017

In the preceding item in his blog I discussed emergence, where elements produce wholes with properties not present in the elements. Emergence is studied as ‘adaptation’ in the research field of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). A subfield of that is that of Agent-Based Computational Models (ABCM). There, interaction and adaptation of agents is simulated in computational models. I have used that, with a PhD candidate and a postdoctoral researcher, to study whether and how trust can arise in markets.¹

In general, such a model has at least the following elements: properties of agents (such as capabilities, preferences), a representation they make of relevant elements in their environment, rules for decision making, a mechanism whereby they observe and evaluate each other, adaptation, i.e. strengthening or weakening of rules and preferences, depending on perceived success, and the invention of new rules.

In this case the central question was under which circumstances, if at all, trust can emerge in markets, even while profit is the criterion of success, and agents can choose between competition and collaboration. They form an opinion on the trustworthiness of partners on the basis of loyalty in collaboration. Next to profit, trust may form part of the value of collaboration. The weight attached to trust relative to profit is adaptive, depending on realised profit. Their own trustworthiness is also adaptive. It is modelled as a threshold of defecting from a relationship: the higher the threshold, the greater the loyalty. In adaptation there is also a random element.

The model enabled us to investigate when and how frequently trust may grow even though success is measured as profit. The aim was to test claims from economics that under competition trust cannot survive. According to the simulations with the model, often trust does indeed grow, but it depends on the circumstances, governed by the settings of parameters of the model.

Beyond this modelling, here I give a reflection on traits that help adaptiveness. If through the uncertainty of emergence it is not possible to determine ahead of time what may happen, then one must be prepared for the unexpected. There are several ways for this.

In *robustness* one chooses a way that is not sensitive to unexpected turns. Then one may lose some benefit in some cases but avoids heavy loss in others. Robustness can be explored in *scenario analyse*. There, one invents different possible futures (scenarios) to investigate how sensitive options are differences between them.

In *flexibility* one chooses a way that can easily and quickly be replaced by another, to adapt to circumstances as they arise.

In *resilience* one is resistant, able to incur and absorb adversity. One form of that it is create *slack*: excess capacity to absorb unforeseeable shocks, in money, time, space, reputation, or cognitive capacity.

In *Inventiveness* one learns to learn, to invent new ways, depending on experience, and to analyse the conduct of others for their success, and to deliberately seek novel challenges by which one can discover new ways. That is found in the theory of invention that I discussed earlier in this blog (items 31, 35).

Diversity is important for the evolution of a group (such as a species, in evolution, or an industry, in markets), and for discovery. It increases the chance that at least one of the various forms fits whatever emerges.

ⁱ Frans de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In search of humanism among the primates*, 2013.

ⁱⁱ See e.g. Carsten K.W. de Dreu, Daniel Balliet & Nir Halevy, Parochial cooperation in humans: Forms and functions of self-sacrifice in intergroup conflict, *Advances in Motivation Science*, 1(2014), p. 1-47.
Carsten K.W. de Dreu, Lindred L. Greer, Gerben A. van Kleef, Shaul Shalvi & Michael J.J. Handgraaf, Oxytocin promotes human ethnocentrism, 2011, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 108, p. 1262-1266.

ⁱ See: T. Klos & B. Nootboom, Agent-based computational transaction cost economics, *Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control*, 25 (2001): 503-526, Alexander Gorobets & Bart Nootboom, Adaptive build-up and breakdown of trust: An agent-based computational approach, *Journal of management and Governance*, 10 (2006): 277-306.