



Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy

#17 | January 2020

Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy

www.eur.nl/esphil/esjp
Contact: esjp@esphil.eur.nl

ISSN: 2212-9677

Editorial

The editorial board of the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy proudly presents to you the 17th edition of the journal. Thanks to the nominations of many professors, we were able to select four papers that, each in their own way, show the capacities and qualities of philosophy students at Erasmus University. Developing one's capacity to think and write in a clear way, and actually do philosophy, is not something that naturally comes with the years. It is made real by positive engagement with one's interests and through hard work. In other words, it is a product of love. The authors in this issue clearly love what they do. During the last few months, they were eager to implement the feedback of our editorial board, which was a stimulating experience for both sides. Thanks to everyone's dedication to make already excellent essays even better, working on this issue has been a great learning experience for everyone involved. I hope you will enjoy reading the essays of Annalisa Costella, Julian Kiefer, Luc Middelkoop and Sander Tuns as much as we did.

At the start of this issue, we had the pleasure to welcome a number of new, motivated editors. From the Bachelor Philosophy, Annabelle Vroone, Ivar Frisch and Toine Spoomakers: all participants in the faculty honours program. I am very pleased to welcome them aboard. From the Double Degree with Philosophy program, Jurian van der Ree joined. Jurian has already proven to be a very dedicated and motivated student with a great interest in Philosophy that he would like to further develop at the ESJP. Welcome Jurian! From the Master Philosophy, Ties van Gemert joined. Ties is a very talented philosopher, who is willing to put a lot of work in revising the work of our authors. Even in the middle of the night in a bus traveling through America, he continued to do his work and did a great job as lead editor. Last but not least, we welcomed six ambitious and enthusiastic students from the Research Master in Philosophy and Economics (EIPE). Chiara Stenico, Erica Yu, Ina Jantgen, Lior Nissim Grinman, Maximilian Gasser and Toine van Mourik, welcome to the ESJP! During the last years, EIPIE has supplied us with a huge number of talented editors and authors. It is clear that EIPE is a source of talented and kind people who are willing to contribute to ESJP.

Unfortunately, we are also saying goodbye to two editors who have been of great support the last three editions: Rodrigo Bustamante and Hnady Abbady. Rodrigo was the secretary of the previous two editions and did a great job in both supporting my predecessor Jeltje and myself in getting started in my new role as editor-in-chief. Hnady has been an editor for three editions now. As a Double Degree student from the TU Delft with a tight schedule, she nevertheless joined our journal and did a great job in both contributing as an editor and being a strong voice at our meetings. Hnady offered us a more than welcome unique perspective and did not hold back to argument for another view, even if she had a minority position. It was great to work with them both and I wish them all the best for the future.

With the welcoming of ten new editors, the ESJP gives the opportunity to 15 philosophy students to increase their skills as editors, work on their passion, broaden their philosophical horizons and revise the works of talented students and in doing so become better writers and philosophers themselves. I am happy and thankful that so many students are willing to work for the ESJP and contribute to its mission to enrich the philosophical environment at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. I would also especially

like to thank Elisabetta Gobbo and Erica Yu. Elisabetta took up the role as the new secretary and for being a guide for me while taking up the role as editor-in-chief from outside. Erica can truly be called our chief-design and was - next to being editor - of great support in creating this issue and realizing the new design for our journal. I am looking forward to work with all the members of the editorial board on the next issue and to realise new initiatives that will contribute to the further development and impact of our journal and community.

Lastly I would like to thank the members of the advisory board, Thijs Heijmeskamp and Jamie van der Klaauw, for their help and trust and Prof. dr. Hub Zwart, Dr. Constanze Binder and Prof. dr. Han van Ruler for becoming new members of our supervisory board. By doing so—without hesitation—they showed their support and appreciation for the contribution of the ESJP to the philosophical community at the Erasmus School of Philosophy and Humanities department of the Erasmus University College for the past nine years. We are looking forward to continuing our work and share the passion for philosophy in our University.

Sven Hogervorst
Editor-in-chief

About the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy

The Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy (ESJP) is a double-blind peer-reviewed student journal that publishes the best philosophical papers written by students from the Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam and from the Humanities Program of the Erasmus University College. Its aims are to further enrich the philosophical environment in which Rotterdam's philosophy students develop their thinking and bring their best work to the attention of a wider intellectual audience. A new issue of the ESJP appears on our website every July and December.

To ensure the highest possible quality, the ESJP only accepts papers that (a) have been written for a course that is part of the EUC or Erasmus School of Philosophy curriculum and (b) nominated for publication in the ESJP by the teacher of that course. Each paper that is published in the ESJP is subjected to a double-blind peer review process in which at least one other teacher and two student editors act as referees.

The ESJP encourages students to keep in mind the possibility of publishing their course papers in our journal, and to write papers that appeal to a wider intellectual audience.

Editorial Board

Sven Hogervorst (Editor-in-chief)
Elisabetta Gobbo (Secretary)

Erica Yu
Rodrigo A Bustamante
Toine van Mourik
Annabelle Vroone
Toine Spoormakers
Ivar Frisch
Jakob Schönhuber
Lior Nissim Grinman
Ties van Gemert
Nicolaas Zondervan
Ina Jantgen
Hnady Abbadly
Jurian Van Der Ree
Maximilian Gasser
Chiara Stenico

Advisory Board

Thijs Heijmeskamp
Jamie van der Klaauw

Supervisory Board

Prof. dr. (Hub) H.A.E. Zwart
Dr. (Constanze) C.B. Binder
Prof. dr. (Han) J.A. van Ruler

Disclaimer

Although the editors of the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy have taken the utmost care in reviewing the papers in this issue, we cannot exclude the possibility that they contain inaccuracies or violate the proper use of academic referencing or copyright in general. The responsibility for these matters therefore remains with the authors of these papers and third parties that choose to make use of them entirely. In no event can the editorial board of the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy or the Faculty of Philosophy of the Erasmus University Rotterdam be held accountable for the contents of these papers.



In this Issue

Economics has seen a number of novel policy applications in the last few decades. In *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, economist Richard Thaler and law professor Cass Sunstein developed one of such applications. Their approach to policy describes people as subject to biases, and as using heuristics to make decisions that are less optimal than presumed by more widely taught schools of the “dismal science”. Nudges work by shaping people’s choices in a way that—as we are promised—respects what their true, fully rational choices would be. In “Behavioral economics: a shaky ground for nudges”, Annalisa Costella warns against the validity of this approach. She sets the stage by providing several examples of nudges—choice of snack in the cafeteria, pension savings, undergoing surgery and more. Annalisa Costella then presents the assumptions that *Nudge* depends upon: That there are such things as stable underlying preferences inside people’s minds, and that they can be accessed freely. The author points first at the lack of support for this position. Furthermore, a complication is glimpsed at: are people’s preference at all distinct from the framing in which decisions are taken? The risk, as the author subtly suggests, is that by trying to help people make better choices, policy makers might be implanting them with artificial ones.

In “Identifying the Other”, Julian Kiefer dives into the crucial notion of identity of a religion by ‘Identifying the Other’, which is also the well-chosen title of his work. Dutch thinkers Desiderius Erasmus and Grotius, born in 1466 and 1583 respectively, chose different groups to identify Protestantism’s other: Roman Catholicism. According to Julian Kiefer this difference may find its cause in a decreased hope for reconciliation between Roman Catholicism and the Protestantism as practiced in the Netherlands. The paper is concerned with the way the great Dutch humanists Desiderius Erasmus and Hugo de Groot deal with their inner-Christian adversaries. More specifically, it aims to portray how they identify certain trends among Christians as either Jewish or Islamic elements.

What is the special nature of morality? In “A Phenomenological Defence of Radical Re-evaluation”, Luc Middelkoop explores the wonder of the origin of moral judgements. He starts out with a puzzlement about a short statement of Charles Taylor. Taylor claims that no universal yardstick exists to determine the correctness of moral evaluations. Thus, we have a responsibility to constantly re-evaluate our evaluations. The puzzlement Luc Middelkoop encounters is twofold: First, how is Taylor able to defend this claim? And second, why does such a responsibility follow? When answering these questions, Luc Middelkoop invites the reader to an endeavor which considers e.g. Heidegger’s phenomenological method, as well as James Gibson’s. He argues that morality springs from a value rich world, which we primarily understand non-conceptually. Further, there is a multiplicity of valid perspectives. Without a universally correct yardstick we are unable to determine how to be moral. The lack of such a yardstick grounds the responsibility for a continuous re-evaluation of our evaluations. In other words, we are responsible to live in a state of openness, to be constantly open to new ways of living.

In “Time Regained”, Sander Tuns discusses an issue that lies at the heart of continental philosophy, namely the question whether metaphysical knowledge is possible. By sketching a sequence that runs from Bergson’s early to his late work and comparing Bergson’s philosophical trajectory to Kant’s critical philosophy, Tuns is able to delineate two diverging pathways in philosophy that have proven to be influential to this day. Where the one path leads to rejecting the possibility for knowledge of the thing-itself, the other leads Bergson and his followers to affirm the possibility for metaphysical knowledge by means of intuition. In his paper, Tuns elucidates the steps of which Bergson’s method of intuition consists, how Bergson’s method relates to that of Kant, and what philosophy and science can ultimately gain from employing such a method.

Table of Contents

Behavioural Economics: <i>A Shaky Ground for Nudges</i> Annalisa Costella	7 - 16
Identifying the Other <i>Grotius and Erasmus on Bad Christians as Jews and Muslims</i> Julian Kiefer	17 - 26
A Phenomenological Defense of Radical Re-evaluation Luc Middelkoop	27 - 42
Time Regained Sander Tuns	43 - 59

Behavioral Economics: A Shaky Ground for Nudges

Annalisa Costella

1. Introduction

Ten years after its first publication, the excitement about “Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness” (2009) has not yet diminished. If at all, it has increased. Methodological and normative critiques continue to be published both in philosophical and economic journals (Heilmann, 2014). *Nudge*, by behavioural economist Thaler and legal scholar Sunstein, proposes an approach to policy making that has come to be known as libertarian paternalism. Libertarian paternalism, as Sunstein (2018) puts it, is a paternalism of means, rather than ends. The idea is that people suffer from a number of biases when making decisions. Hence, they often take a suboptimal route to reach their goals. Libertarian paternalism enables people to satisfy those goals by guiding them towards the optimal route. Just like a GPS, libertarian paternalism offers people the best means to reach the ends that they themselves set out to achieve (ibid). It increases people’s *navigability* by offering them the best path to follow in order to satisfy *their* goals. To argue for their thesis, Thaler & Sunstein (2009) draw heavily on the findings of behavioural economics and related work in psychology. However, is it really the case that these findings lend empirical and conceptual support to the assumptions on which *Nudge* is based? This is the question that I will engage with in this essay.

I will argue that, contrary to what Thaler & Sunstein (2009) contend, the findings of behavioural economics alone do not provide sufficient theoretical support for nudges. To argue for it, I will first present the justification of libertarian paternalism that Sunstein and Thaler offer, by drawing on behavioural economics (Section 2). Subsequently, I will critically assess this justification. I will make use of related philosophical work on preference formation to argue that a prominent position in the field, the constructed preference view, does not warrant the interaction between preferences and choices that Thaler and Sunstein embrace. The *constructed preference view* only lends support to the existence of one category of preference mentioned by Sunstein (2018) (i.e. endogenous preferences). However, this category of preferences is problematic since it is incompatible with Sunstein and Thaler’s justification of nudges. Moreover, even if Sunstein and Thaler’s picture of the interaction between preferences and choices were correct, it is still the case that findings in behavioural economics do not provide sufficient support for the theoretical assumptions behind *Nudge*. Indeed, even if people had underlying true preferences, it would be hard to clearly distinguish them from the framing of those preferences (Section 3). I will then conclude with a plea for caution in embracing the leap from behavioural economic findings to nudges (Section 4).

2. Behavioural Economics as a justification for Nudge

In the lecture he gave when he received the Nobel Prize, Thaler (2018) referred to “Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases” (1974) by psychologists Kahneman and Tversky as his first discovery of a scientific approach that tackled what he had been observing for a while, namely people’s departure from the predictions of rational choice theory. With “rational choice theory”, I refer to a “representative individual” who has complete,

consistent and continuous preferences¹ The paper by Tversky & Kahneman, which started what would have later been known as the "Heuristics and Biases" program, pointed at the fact that people seem to use heuristics, which are rules of thumbs, when making decisions. Heuristics, in turn, might induce individuals to make predictable "mistakes" (Thaler, 2018). The idea expressed in that paper, and fostered by later works by Kahneman and Tversky (Kahneman, 2003) and a number of other authors (Rabin & Kőszegi, 2007; Camerer & Loewenstein, 2004), is that real-life agents act and behave very differently from rational agents. Individuals in real life do not have complete and continuous preferences. They overweight low probabilities and underweight high ones (Heilmann, 2014). They suffer from self-control problems, which make them display an inconsistent pattern of preferences (Thaler, 2018).

Let me provide an overview of the main findings of behavioural economics, before turning to how Sunstein and Thaler use them as a theoretical basis for justifying nudges. The review will be admittedly brief and incomplete, but it will shed some light on the intuition behind *Nudge*.

The body of work in behavioural economics that I will focus on is the one by psychologists Kahneman and Tversky. I will concentrate specifically on two major strands of their work, one on people's heuristics and biases, and another on framing effects and individual rationality. With regard to the first project, the main hunch behind Kahneman and Tversky's work is that people have two different modes of thinking and making decisions: System 1 and System 2 (Kahneman, 2003). System 1 is a cognitive process that is automatic, fast and emotionally charged (Kahneman, 2003). It usually draws on habits and heuristics (ibid.). System 2, in contrast, is slower, effortful and controlled. Mental signals are assigned to System 1 or 2 depending on the mental effort needed to handle them (ibid.). Hence, System 2 processes highly demanding mental tasks, while System 1 handles effortless ones. Since people's ability for mental effort is limited, they are usually unable to deal with many different effortful tasks. Contrary to effortless ones, demanding tasks disrupt each other. In this sense, Kahneman and Tversky have argued that System 2 "monitors" System 1. This is a shorthand for saying that individuals are more likely to react to tasks in a way that is not thought-through if they are already engaged in a demanding activity (Kahneman, 2003).

The idea of System 1 and System 2 is closely related to the concept of Planner and Doer that Thaler initially developed with Shrefin (Shefrin & Thaler, 1988) and that Thaler and Sunstein use recurrently in later work (Thaler, 2018; Sunstein, 2018). On Thaler's view, it is possible to build a two-self model of decision-making. According to this model, individuals' attitude to decision-making can be influenced by two contrasting dispositions, a "farsighted" planner and a "myopic" doer. The planner is a rational agent who tries to maximise her utility over time, while the doer easily indulges in short-term passions that contrast with the project of long-term maximisation. Thaler leaves the specific terms in which the planner and doer interact almost unspecified. However, he gives a hint by depicting them behaving in a principal-agent relationship, in which the principal (planner) attempts to induce the agent (doer) to do what he wants by either adopting pre-commitment strategies or relying on feelings of guilt developed after impulsive acts.

The second line of research pursued by Kahneman and Tversky regards framing effects and individual rationality (Kahneman, 2003). The idea is that, contrary to what economic theory predicts, the decision that an individual makes, given the set of options she is confronted with, varies depending on how the options at hand are

¹ In this essay, I refer to rational choice theory as the theory of choice presented in mainstream, widely used, economic textbooks such as Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green, 1995 and Kreps, 2013. However, it should be noted that equating rational choice theory to the theory of choice presented in mainstream advanced economic textbooks is not consensually accepted in the literature (see, for instance, Gilboa et al., 2009). Moreover, this is only one view on rational choice theory.

presented (Kahneman, 2003). Hence, framing the same set of options in different ways influences (sometimes predictably) how the individual will choose (Kahneman, 2003). The idea of framing effects is also present in Bernheim's work in behavioural economics. According to him (Bernheim, 2016), it is possible to better understand people's evaluations of the options in a set if these are divided into direct and indirect judgements. Direct judgements are the judgements that people have over a set of alternatives, regardless of how those alternatives are presented. As Bernheim (2016, 17) puts it, direct judgements are judgements about "outcomes we care about for their own sake – our "ultimate objectives". Indirect judgements, in contrast, are judgements over the options that lead to the outcomes we care about. To make the difference clear, think of the following. I like the crunchiness of apples more than the softness of pears. This is a direct judgement. I prefer apples over pears. Imagine that I do grocery shopping online on a Dutch website. Since I do not understand Dutch, I need to translate the names of the different fruits to my native language. Hence, clicking on the fruit option involves an indirect judgement (i.e. my translation). If I believe, mistakenly, that "peer", in Dutch, means apple, then I will select some pears in my online shopping rather than some apples. My ending up with a worse option (pears, in this case) would be the result of a faulty indirect judgement. Behavioural economics, Bernheim argues, does not dispute my direct judgement of apples being better than pears. It only disputes the indirect judgement that leads me to buy pears rather than apples. By changing the framing of the options (i.e. in the example at hand by, for instance, attaching pictures of the different fruits to their respective names), a nudge can intervene on my indirect judgement in a way that makes it easier for me to choose the option that reflects my direct judgement.

Behavioural economics has produced a striking body of results that seems to be pointing at the following. People suffer from "biases" when making decisions. Hence, they might end up choosing an option or end up making a decision that is suboptimal for them. Therefore, changing the choice architecture, namely the environment in which people make a decision, without limiting the options that people have, can help them make better choices, *as judged by themselves* (Guala & Mittone, 2015). "Better choices" and "as judged by themselves" are both vague terms. Thaler and Sunstein are not explicit about their. However, they loosely use this condition to imply that individuals can evaluate a choice as better than another, upon reflection. "Better choices", in this context, stand for choices that better reflect people's preferences. If the satisfaction of preferences is taken to reflect an individual's well-being, as Thaler and Sunstein assume (Sunstein, 2017), then "better choices" has a further meaning. It means that those choices are better conducive to people's well-being. Nudges help exactly in this respect, according to Sunstein and Thaler. They are a tool for policy interventions, which help individuals make better decisions, as judged by themselves. Broadly understood, they steer people away from mistakes in their decision-making process by either eliminating biases or using those biases to trigger better decisions (Guala & Mittone, 2015).

This is just a brief and incomplete list of "biases" that people suffer from (for an extended one, see Kahneman (2003) and Thaler (2018)). Critically analysing the main findings of behavioural economics, however, is not the aim of the present essay. What I would like to present in the following subsections is, instead, how these findings have been used by Thaler and Sunstein to advocate for the use of nudges as policy interventions.

2.1. Nudges: from retirement to surgery

There are many examples of nudges implemented both at a governmental and firm level. Let me sketch a few examples:

Retirement plan: Barbara has problems in saving for retirement. She does not behave according to

the idea of life-cycle models of savings. According to the life-cycle hypothesis, Barbara should smooth her consumption over her life-time wealth. This means that, in every instance of her life, she should spend a constant fraction of her life-time wealth (Shefrin & Thaler, 1988). However, she does not do this. She is tempted by a number of spending opportunities which make her consume a higher portion of income than she would have liked to. If she were automatically enrolled in a retirement plan in the firm she works for, she would save a higher portion of her income. She would not bother to switch to the manual enrolment, and she would be grateful for it.

Healthy food in a cafeteria: Chris is on a diet. Hence, he has a long-term preference for healthy over unhealthy food, and should act consistently on this preference, according to the prescriptions of standard economics. However, every time he reaches the till of a cafeteria, he cannot refrain from buying his usual Mars bar that is placed right next to the till. It is just too tempting! Paul, the owner of the cafeteria, wants to help Chris in avoiding succumbing to temptation. He removes the Mars bar from its position and places it in an almost hidden position in the cafe. Chris is not tempted by the Mars bar anymore and can switch to a healthy apple instead. He is grateful for this.

Drinking campaign: Ellen is a student at Cornell. On a night out, she prefers sipping a glass of wine to downing the notorious “fishbowl”, a mixture of highly alcoholic liquors and sugary powders. If she were a rational agent, she would act consistently on that wine preference in every situation. However, everyone around her boasts about blacking out in the weekend and she feels socially pressured to do the same. As a result, she sips wine when she is out with close friends, but chugs a “fishbowl” at Frat parties, when she is surrounded by strangers. She acts inconsistently, since she *reverses* her preferences depending on the situation at hand. She happens to read an article on the university magazine where she discovers that only a low percentage of students in the whole university drinks so much to black out every weekend. She feels relieved and switches to her beloved glass of wine.

Surgery: Michael is afraid of surgeries and does not want to undertake a minor one. His doctor, whom he trusts fully, tells him that this surgery will change his life for the better, and convinces him of taking it. Michael undergoes the surgery and is grateful for this.

These are only some of the many possible examples of nudges. For an expanded list, see Thaler & Sunstein (2009). For the purposes of this essay, however, those examples are sufficient to identify nudges that target different *categories* of preferences.

2.2. *Three types of preferences as a target for nudges*

There are three types of preferences that nudges can apply to, according to Sunstein (2018). Those are:

Antecedent or context-independent preferences:

Individuals have clear antecedent preferences that nudges help them satisfy (Sunstein, 2018). This is the case of Ellen in **drinking campaign**. She has a clear preference for not drinking too much. Nudges help her to satisfy this preference.

Underlying true preferences:

Individuals might suffer from problems of self-control. They might have two different orders of preferences. A doer's preference for indulging to temptation and a planner's context-independent

preference for not doing so. This is the case of Barbara in **Retirement plan** and Chris in **Healthy food in a cafeteria**.

Context-dependent, endogenous preferences:

Individuals might not have stable, context-independent preferences. Their preferences might depend primarily on the context in which they get formed. Hence, their preferences are merely the product of the nudge. This is arguably the case of Michael in **Surgery**. His preference for undergoing or refraining from the surgery is merely the result of contextual cues. With a different doctor, he might have developed a different attitude towards the surgery.

So far, I have shown how nudges can address different categories of preferences, which I grouped in three main types, namely context-independent preferences, underlying true preferences and context-dependent ones. With this framework in mind, I will set out to investigate whether the justification that is standardly provided for nudges can hold for all these types of preferences. I argue that findings in behavioural economics can justify nudges if two conditions are jointly satisfied. On the one hand, it should be the case that work in behavioural economics and psychology lends support to the existence of (at least one of) these three categories of preferences. On the other, it should hold that the existing type(s) of preference, by itself (themselves), is (are) compatible with the justification for nudges provided by behavioural economists, which is that nudges only help people taking the optimal route to satisfy *their* preferences, as judged by themselves. This means that there should be quite robust evidence that either:

- a) People have antecedent, context-independent preferences, which nudges help satisfy.
- b) People have underlying true preferences, which they fail to satisfy because of weakness of will. Nudges help them satisfy these preferences.
- c) There are instances in which people have context-dependent preferences. Nudges frame the environment in which people make decisions in a way that helps them to form preferences that they deem desirable to retain.

It is worth noticing that the *joint* satisfaction of a), b) and c) is not necessary to justify nudges. It might be the case that only one of these conditions holds. This would be enough to justify nudges in the relevant respective scenario. However, the scope of nudges would be significantly diminished.

Before analysing whether a), b) and c) are satisfied, let me focus on the second condition, which is whether the standard justification for nudges in behavioural economics holds valid for these three types of preference. The two first categories of preferences, if existing, supposedly form a quite straightforward theoretical basis for the nudge project. The idea in these two cases is that people have true, underlying preferences that exist in their head and that they are able to access (imperfectly, as in the cases formulated above) (Bernheim, 2016). By reframing the environment in a way that better enables people to make choices that conform with their true, underlying preferences, nudges would simply help them satisfy those preferences. The third category is more controversial, since it is unclear how nudges can help people in making "better choices" when people do not have clear true preferences for a certain outcome. Those cases, as Sunstein (2018) himself admits, are more complex. If there are no true, underlying preferences, then it becomes unclear how nudges help people to reframe the choice architecture in order to make those people better off.

Time to take stock. Behavioural economics has produced a striking amount of evidence that people suffer from mistakes and biases when making decisions. Those mistakes and biases prevent them from making choices that are optimal, according to their own judgement. Nudges are policy interventions that steer people away from those mistakes, by addressing three main categories of preferences. These are context-independent preferences, underlying true preferences and endogenous preferences. I have argued that, if the first two exist, then the justification for nudges provided by behavioural economists such as Sunstein and Thaler holds valid. In contrast, this justification for nudges is not sufficient if only the third category exists.

3. Behavioural Economics as a justification for Nudge?

At a first glance, Thaler and Sunstein's argument seems compelling. But does it hold up to scrutiny? I believe it does not, and I will argue for this in the remainder.

My argument proceeds in two steps. First, I argue that prominent work on preference formation in philosophy of science does not lend support to the existence of the first two categories of preferences mentioned in Section 2. Second, I argue that, even if those findings were incorrect, there is still a theoretical difficulty. Disentangling preferences from their framing is difficult and, consequently, the identification of preferences is not a straightforward task. As a result, what counts as a preference and what counts as framing might partly be the artefact of the behavioural economist herself. Hence, the justification for nudges provided by Thaler and Sunstein, which is that they help people better satisfy their preferences, as judged by themselves, does not hold.

Let me start with the first step. One prominent view in philosophy of science about how preferences get formed is the *constructed preferences view*, which is backed by recent psychological findings (Bernheim, 2016). According to it, individuals do not have a true, underlying preference for a specific outcome. They form a preference only in the moment in which they are asked to make a choice. In that specific moment, they aggregate a number of aspects of their current experience and form a preference that did not exist before. As Bernheim (2016, 20) puts it, "from this perspective, the concepts of "true preferences" and "experienced utility" are fictions; they may play useful roles in "as-if" representations of behaviour, but we should not take them literally." The view according to which it is implausible that people have underlying true preferences is expressed also by Guala & Mittone (2015) and Sunstein (2018).² According to both, it is psychologically questionable to think of choices as the result of an interaction between underlying true preferences and biases in the decision-making process. If the constructed preference view is correct, then neither the first category of preferences (antecedent preferences) nor the second one (underlying preferences) are grounded on a valid philosophical account of preference formation (that is psychologically informed). In contrast, the third category, namely the one of context-dependent endogenous preferences, does not seem incompatible with the constructed preference view. Indeed, if people form preferences only when they are called upon to do so, and those preferences are highly dependent on the framing, then it is plausible to assume that their preferences are context-dependent and endogenous. However, this third category is also the most problematic for nudges. The reason is that nudges are presented as tools for policy making that change the framing of

² For related psychological work on the subject, see Simon, Krawczyk, Bleicher, and Holyoak, (2004, 2008); Lichtenstein and Slovic, (2006).

the options in a way that enables people to better satisfy their preferences. Nevertheless, if people's preferences are the mere result of framing, then it is unclear why changing from one framing to another should enable people to better satisfy their preferences, if these do not exist outside the framing itself. Hence, it is debatable whether the existence of context-dependence preferences justifies nudges at all. If context independent preferences do not exist and endogenous preferences do not point to any specific set of preferences that an individual has reason to uphold, the findings of behavioural economics *alone* are not sufficient to justify nudging in the way that Thaler and Sunstein do. That is, nudges cannot be defended on the sole ground that they are tools that help people better satisfy their own preferences.

A supporter of nudges, however, could object in two ways. She could argue that the constructed preference view, even if prominent among philosophers of science, is only one among many possible accounts of how preferences are formed in psychology³ Hence, its validity is not fixed in stone and it might turn out to be a wrong theory. Or she could point at psychological literature that shares the view that preferences are constructed but argues that stable preferences are not incompatible with this view⁴ Let us assume that either of these is the case. Hence, either preferences do not form in the way that the "constructed view" envisions or, even if they do, they can be stable over time. Nudges could then be limited to addressing either the first two categories of preferences or preferences that are formed on the spot but are stable over time. Would this clear the ground for a behavioural economic foundation of nudges? No, according to Infante et al. (2016a,b). This leads me to the second step of my argument.

Imagine, as Infante et al. (2016a) ask us to do, that SuperReasoner, an individual who has underlying true preferences and whose judgement is governed exclusively by System 2, the slow, forgetful reasoning mode explained in Section 2. She has no cognitive limits. She possesses infinite information. How would she behave in situations such as **Retirement plan** and **Healthy food in a cafeteria**? Differently from Barbara and Chris? Infante et al. argue that she would not. What they argue is that SuperReasoner in the cafeteria might well choose the Mars bar if this is close to the till and, the following day, the healthy snack if this is the one right next to the till. This choice is inconsistent only under the reading that SuperReasoner can have exclusively a context-independent preference for healthy snack over Mars bar rather than a preference for "healthy snack next to the till" over "healthy snack far away from the till". Her preferences are inconsistent only under the reading that the only correct way to interpret the distance between the food and the till is merely a matter of framing, rather than being part of the preference itself. In turn, the supporter of nudges might be highly sceptical of this example. Indeed, she might object that in the cafeteria case it is hard to argue against the stance that the position of the food is clearly only a matter of framing. The direct judgement of SuperReasoner is obviously the one between the healthy snack and the Mars bar. The remainder (i.e. the position of the food) is plainly the result of indirect judgement. This might well be the case, but it does not say anything about the generalisability of our nudges' supporter latter remark, namely that framing and preferences can be disentangled straightforwardly in real-life scenarios. Indeed, there are many real-life situations in which clearly distinguishing between the framing and the underlying preference that a person has might be extremely complex. To see it, think of **Retirement plan**. How should one distinguish the underlying preference for consuming or saving from its framing? Hence, even if people had true underlying or

³ See, for instance, Caleb Warren, McGraw, and Van Boven, (2011).

⁴ See, for instance, Bettman, Luce, and Payne, (2008) for a similar point.

context-independent preferences, disentangling those preferences from their framing is a highly complex task. The reason is that the behavioural economist would need to understand what the chooser herself considers the object of her preferences and what its framing. This consideration not only changes from one person to another but might be not so clear even to the chooser herself. If true preferences and framing of those preferences cannot be distinguished, it is unclear how nudges could intervene exclusively on framing effects, when those have not been clearly individuated. Hence, if true, the findings of behavioural economics, on their own, do not present a sufficient justification for policy interventions such as nudges.

In a nutshell, I have argued that Behavioural Economics does not support nudges on its own. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the constructed preference view only provides support for the existence of context-dependent, endogenous preferences. Since endogenous preferences are exclusively the result of framing, and nudges change the framing from one to another, it is hard to see how this change in the choice architecture can help people better satisfy preferences that they do not have in the first place. This first step in my argument leaves open the possibility that, if the constructed preference view were incorrect, then nudges could still be justified in cases in which people have underlying true preferences. I rule out this concern by arguing that there is a stronger conceptual reason for why findings from behavioural economics alone cannot provide a sufficient justification for nudges. This is that, even if people had underlying true preferences, distinguishing them from the framing is difficult. In many instances, deciding what counts as framing and what as preference is merely the result of an arbitrary artifice carried out by the behavioural economist.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that findings from behavioural economics *alone* are not enough to provide a justification for the theoretical assumptions behind *Nudge*. To argue for this, I have first laid out Thaler and Sunstein's argument: that findings from behavioural economics provide the theoretical basis on which the nudge program is founded. Subsequently, I have analysed this claim. I have argued that it is problematic for two reasons. First, not all the three categories of preferences that Sunstein (2018) identifies seem to be compatible with a prominent model of preference formation. Indeed, only one of them, endogenous preferences, would be compatible with this model. However, Thaler and Sunstein's justification for nudges does not hold up to scrutiny if the only existing preferences are endogenous ones. Second, even if this first objection did not hold, there is still a stronger, conceptual objection. That is, even if the first two categories of preferences highlighted by Sunstein were compatible with a psychological model of preference formation, behavioural economic findings *alone* would not be able to provide sufficient justification for the theoretical assumptions behind nudges. The reason for it is that the distinction between underlying preferences and their framing is often the artefact of the behavioural economist herself.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jack Vromen for the sharp feedback on an initial version of this essay and for nominating it to the editors of ESJP. By doing so, he provided me with my very last opportunity to engage with the extremely stimulating activity of contributing to a very well-run student journal. Moreover, I am grateful to some anonymous ESJP referees. Their patient and constructive feedback on

a number of previous versions of this essay challenged me to rethink and revise my essay extensively.

Annalisa Costella (1995) obtained a BSc in Economics at Bocconi University in Milan, where she was born and raised. She then moved to the London School of Economics to attend an MSc in Philosophy of the Social Sciences. She continued her education with a Research Master in Philosophy and Economics at Erasmus University, where she is currently doing her PhD in Philosophy. Her life in Rotterdam did not change substantively from the previous edition. She still complains about Dutch cooking skills, and is still equally unable to play tennis. The only addition is her new willingness to learn how to climb, an attempt that is likely to end up in the same way as tennis did.

References

- Bernheim, D. 2009. "Behavioral welfare economics". *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 7 (2-3): 267–319.
- Bernheim, B. Douglas. 2016. "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Unified Approach to Behavioral Welfare Economics." *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis* 7 (1): 12–68.
- Bettman, J. R., Luce, M. F., and Payne, J. W. 2008. "Preference construction and preference stability: Putting the pillow to rest." *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 18 (3): 170–174.
- Camerer, C., and Loewenstein, G. 2003. "Behavioral economics: Past, present, future." In *Advances in Behavioral Economics*, 3-51.
- Gilboa, I., Postlewaite, A., and Schmeidler, D. 2009. "Is it always rational to satisfy Savage's axioms?" *Economics & Philosophy*, 25 (3): 285-296.
- Guala, F., and Mittone, L. 2015. "A Political Justification of Nudging." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 6 (3): 385–395.
- Heilmann, C. 2014. "Success conditions for nudges: A methodological critique of libertarian paternalism". *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, 4 (1): 75–94.
- Infante, G., Lecouteux, G., and Sugden, R. 2016a. "Preference purification and the inner rational agent: a critique of the conventional wisdom of behavioural welfare economics." *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 23 (1): 1–25.
- Infante, G., Lecouteux, G., and Sugden, R. 2016b. "On the Econ within: a reply to Daniel Hausman." *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 23 (1): 33–37.
- Kahneman, D. 2003. "Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics." *American Economic Review*, 93 (5): 1449–1475.
- Kreps, D. M. 2013. *Microeconomic foundations I: choice and competitive markets (Vol. 1)*. Princeton university press.
- Lichtenstein, S., and Slovic, P. 2006. *The construction of preferences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mas-Colell, A., Whinston, M., and Green, J. 1995. *Microeconomic theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rabin, M., and K szegi, B. 2007. "Mistakes in Choice-Based Welfare Analysis." *American Economic Review*, 97 (2): 477–481.
- Shefrin, H. M., and Thaler, R. H. 1988. "THE BEHAVIORAL LIFE-CYCLE HYPOTHESIS." *Economic Inquiry*, 26 (4): 609–643.
- Sunstein, C. R. 2018. "Better off, as judged by themselves: a comment on evaluating nudges." *International Review of Economics*, 65 (1): 1–8.
- Thaler, R. H. 2018. "From Cashews to Nudges: The Evolution of Behavioral Economics." *American Economic Review*, 108 (6): 1265-87.

- Thaler, R. H., and Sunstein, C. R. 2009. *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Penguin.
- Tversky, A., and Kahneman, D. 1974. "Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases." *Science*, 185 (4157): 1124–1131.
- Simon, D., Krawczyk, D. C., Bleicher, A., and Holyoak, K. J. 2008. „The transience of constructed preferences." *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 21 (1): 1–14.
- Warren, C., McGraw, P., and Van Boven, L. 2011. "Values and preferences: defining preference construction." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 2 (2): 193-205.



Identifying the Other:

Grotius and Erasmus on Bad Christians as Jews and Muslims

Julian Kiefer

1. Introduction, or On Religious Claim and Dissent

Religions, at the very least those of monotheistic nature, deal with the Absolute: God, the human soul, and this world (to name the classic subjects of *metaphysica specialis*)—as well as, in religions of Abrahamic origin, with the respective role that these three entities play in the all-encompassing story from creation to salvation. It is only natural, then, that any one religion's claim must be as absolute as the matters it deals with: it itself must be right, all other religions must be wrong. It might be possible for other religions to contain some truths about God amidst their errors, but even then, they must still be considered inferior to the one true religion whose dogmata are not merely partially but wholly true; and as long as it is inferior, i.e., not completely true, it can only be called wrong nonetheless. This strict distinction between true and false belief—Jan Assmann's *mosaische Unterscheidung*—may for some present readers sound harsh or intolerant, but it is the only ground on which a religion can stand by its claim that belief or unbelief is not merely a question of way of life, but soteriologically significant.

All this entails that unity is of utmost importance to a religion; after all, the strict distinction between the truth and the false Other is only possible as long as that which is proclaimed as the truth is itself consistent. Dissent among one religion might just as well be considered dissent among altogether different religions; the problem is that, far from simply talking past each other, the dissenting parties will claim to be representative of the same religion, thus fundamentally endangering each other's religious identity. If Roman Catholicism is the only truly Christian religion, then Protestantism is not only wrong—it is not even Christian. How, then, can one religious denomination insulate itself against the affront that is the existence of another laying claim to the same name? The obvious answer is: by demonstrating that the rival denomination has no right to bear the same title, in other words, that it is a fundamentally different religion. The easiest way to achieve this is by means of equating the rival with a religion that, despite bearing similarities to one's own in certain respects, is already well established in its alienness. For the Christian religion, Judaism and Islam constitute the most likely candidates for such a procedure.

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks, it is hardly surprising that, when criticising certain trends and groups within their own religion, Desiderius Erasmus and Hugo Grotius identify them as Jewish or Islamic. Both Erasmus and Grotius are keenly interested in Christian unity, and both of them have a very distinct—and, for a good part, quite similar—notion of what proper Christian unity, a Christianity deserving of its name, should look like. However, it seems to me that these two illustrate how, with changing times and circumstances, the attribution to foreign religions—in other words, the precise nature of the identification of the Other within one's own community—change as well. It is for this reason that, in this paper, I aim to portray their use of interreligious polemics to chide what they would regard as a decline in Christian faith proper. Erasmus and Grotius (famously called the 'second Erasmus') have long been, even in Grotius's own lifetime, regarded as comparable figures, and it may be interesting to see against whom they felt that they needed to defend their mutual goal—a unified and

universal Christianity—against. It may also shed some light upon the question of just how similar Erasmus’s and Grotius’s attitudes really are: bearing in mind our introductory remarks, one way of understanding their respective notion of Christianity is by looking at who is excluded from it.

Given the very limited scope of this paper, I cannot at all hope to do their respective views on adequate piety and on the other Abrahamic religions justice. I can only aim to sketch in very broad strokes some aspects related to our topic, adducing a series of remarks that must remain in danger of being selective. Least of all, I want to deliver a comprehensive description of the position of Islam and Judaism in Erasmus’s and Grotius’s thinking. Rather, I am interested in how Islam and Judaism are referenced in inner-Christian criticism. My goal is accomplished if I can make plausible the claim that there has been a shift of enemy lines; more precisely, it appears to me that while, for Erasmus, Judaism seems to best fit the erroneous ways of contemporary Christianity, for Grotius it rather seems to be Islam that corresponds to his major adversary, that is, Roman Catholicism. To this end, I will first call attention to relevant passages in Grotius’s *De veritate religionis christianae* and in his *Remonstrantie* (section II) before doing the same with Erasmus’s *De bello Turcico* and a selection of other writings (section III). I will then proceed to offer some general (and decidedly preliminary) thoughts on why such a shift might have occurred and in what respects it may or may not reflect a shift in attitude towards their respective enemies within Christendom (section IV).

2. Grotius: Catholic Muslims and Convertible Jews

Let us begin by looking at the one closer to our own time, Hugo Grotius. In his *De veritate religionis christianae*, it is quite obvious that his critique of Islam is in major respects a rejection of Roman Catholicism. The very origin of Islam lies, for him, in the deterioration of Christendom: the story of Islam is, in its roots, the story of how “that sincere and unfeigned piety, which flourished amongst the Christians, who were most grievously afflicted and tormented, began by degrees to abate”.¹ This abatement is described as follows: “the world [was brought] in[to] the church”, “bishops quarrelled with each other most bitterly about the highest places” and a general “preferring the tree of knowledge to the tree of life . . . , so then nice inquiries were esteemed more than piety, and religion was made an art”²—all of them quite typical Reformed polemics against the Catholic church.

So far, one might think that Catholicism constitutes only the cause of the rise of Islam, not the nature of Islam itself. But Grotius makes sure to add:

and when the great slaughter made by these [sc. the migration of the peoples, J.K.], did not suffice to reform those which remained; by the just permission of God, Mahomet planted in Arabia a new religion directly opposite to the Christian religion; yet such as did, in a good measure, express in words, the life of a great part of the Christians . . .³

Islam is thus more than just punishment for decaying Christianity, it is the embodiment of, and a proper

¹ Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*. Corrected, and illustrated with notes, by Mr. Le Clerc. Translated by John Clarke, D.D. New Edition. London 1829. p. 227.

² *Op. cit.* p. 228f.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 231.

name given for, decaying Christianity itself. Muslims are, in essence, crypto-Catholics.⁴ Hence Grotius adds more elements to the list of common anti-Catholic polemics, this time as a characterisation of Islam directly:

This religion [sc. Islam, J.K.], which was calculated for bloodshed, delights much in ceremonies, and would be believed, without allowing liberty to enquire into it: for which reason the vulgar are prohibited reading those books which they account sacred; which is a manifest sign of their iniquity⁵

It is not difficult to see here not only the complaint about Christian overreliance on external ceremonies but also the topos of the inaccessibility of the Holy Scriptures to the laity.

Concerning the relationship of Islam to pre-Christian religiosity, he states that

it is no wonder, that childish rudiments should precede the most perfect law, such as that of Christ is; but it is very preposterous, after the publication thereof, to return to figures and types. Nor can any reason be given, why any other religion ought to be published, after the Christian religion, which is far the best.⁶

‘Childish’ sounds far less damning in comparison to his characterisation of Islam; and indeed, we will now see how much milder his stance towards Judaism is.

This is already apparent in how he addresses the Jews: “the Jewish religion, which is a part and the beginning of truth, appears to us, much like twilight to a person gradually advancing out of a very dark cave: wherefore I desire the Jews, that they would not look upon us as adversaries. We know very well, that they are the offspring of holy men;”⁷ *et cetera*; and, in his 1615 *Remonstrantie*:

They are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises. ... When we look for arguments to decide which books in the Old Testament are canonical, we call upon the Jews. ... The pagans have false gods. The Mohammedans have a false Prophet. The Jews at any rate have the true God and the true Prophets. The core of their belief is what we believe, too, and that which we believe in addition to this, we prove on the basis of the writings they believe in.⁸

⁴ The Protestant connecting of Islam with Catholicism is not an invention of Grotius’s; for an overview of its history—omitting, however, Erasmus who might also be considered for that list, at least if we substitute ‘Catholicism’ with ‘scholasticism’—, see J. P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion. A Study of his Work De veritate religionis christianae* (1640). Translated by J. C. Grayson. Leiden & Boston 2004. pp. 156–160.

⁵ Grotius, *op. cit.* p. 231f. It is perhaps noteworthy how, after first criticising “nice inquiries”, he now urges the liberty to enquire into religious affairs. However, it should be clear the first instance is part of an anti-scholastic Reformed polemic against an a priori cloud cuckoo land—a form of intellectual *Werkgerechtigkeit*, if you will—whereas the second one enforces the sola scriptura principle and non-hierarchical access to the scriptures.

⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 239.

⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 181.

⁸ Grotius, *Remonstrantie of 1615*. Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis. Ed. by David Kromhout and Adri K. Offenbergh. Translated into English by Cid van Heertum. Leiden & Boston 2019. pp. 202f.

Concerning the question of whether Sephardi immigrants should be allowed to practise their religion, he mentions that “the argument from God’s law might be put forward, that idolatry among God’s people was strictly forbidden”, to which he replies: “The argument relating to the prohibition of idolatry is not valid here. ... [T]he worship of the Jews is not idolatry but worship to God, though adulterated with superstition ...”⁹ Meanwhile, Catholics cannot be exempt from this accusation: “We know that a large part of Christendom has adulterated religion with idolatry, especially the worship of statues, something expressly forbidden by the inviolable law of God, which the Jews justly adhere to in this respect.”¹⁰

Consequently, he regards Catholics as much more dangerous to the provinces: “The congregations of the Roman Catholics, who acknowledge the Pope”—“a notorious enemy of this state”—“as their leader and supreme commander ..., are incomparably more dangerous than the congregations of the Jews, whose religion knows neither a leader nor a prince.”¹¹ Indeed, in accordance with our introductory remarks, he states: “We have numerous religions here; and the least danger is from the one that differs most: *Most bitter are the hatreds of brothers, and easy is the fall from nearby.*”¹²

It appears that Catholics and, *a fortiori*, Muslims are more or less to be regarded as a lost cause due to their needless regression from truths already evident, while Jews are more akin to Reformed Christians who are *not yet quite there*—but very well might be, which is why Grotius’s ultimate aim in allowing in the Jews, their conversion to Reformed Christianity, seems to him to be within arm’s reach:

The apostle Paul [in Romans 11:25f., J.K.] ... explicitly says that a full conversion of the Jewish people is to be expected finally It is important, therefore, to follow God’s will, and allow the Jews to live among those Christians who have turned away from idols and idolatry and are therefore rightly called reformed.¹³

The good example of righteous Christians, then, will do enough to eventually convert the Jews; a hope of Grotius’s that he motivates in *De veritate religionis christianae* by arguing that the Jews, by their own way of religious reasoning, have ultimately no reason not to accept the wonders of Jesus of Nazareth and that he is the Christ, i.e., the foretold Messiah. It is noteworthy that, in *De veritate*, there is nowhere even a mention of the prospect of converting Muslims to Christianity.

3. Erasmus: Half-Christian Turks and Half-Jewish Christians

We have seen how Grotius identifies his chief enemy, Roman Catholicism, with Islam, portraying the latter as the perfect embodiment of what is wrong with the former, and how, by comparison, the Jews

⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 204.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 202.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* p. 205.

¹² *Op. cit.* p. 204. The italics denote a Latin citation from Tacitus. Cf. *ibid.*, note 10.

¹³ *Op. cit.* p. 202.

¹⁴ Cf. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (see above, note 1), book V, c. g. sections XIII and XIV. Cf. Heering, *op. cit.* p. 59.

are treated almost as allies to the common threat of ungodly idolatry.¹⁵

Let us now take a look at how Erasmus treats them both. Erasmus does not say much about Islam as a whole but rather about the Turks in particular, although he does mention them together with the Saracens,¹⁶ which might indicate that, if he is at all interested in Islam, he takes the Turks as *pars pro toto*. Like Grotius, he invokes the topos of Muslim conquests as punishment for Christian immorality,¹⁷ using the Turks as a mirror image of Christian sins: “If we really want to heave the Turks from our necks, we must first expel from our hearts a more loathsome race of Turks, avarice, ambition, the craving for power, self-satisfaction, impiety, extravagance, the love of pleasure, deceitfulness, anger, hatred, envy”.¹⁸ However, at least to me, it seems that ‘Turkish’, here, is a metaphor for much more general notions of sinfulness than what is meant by Islam in Grotius’s *De veritate*. There, Islam is characterised by more specific errors of religious practice, for example, quasi-Catholic idolatry. Concerning such theological specifics, Erasmus, on the other hand, seems to move the Turks rather close to proper Christians—especially in comparison to the Jews—, even calling them “half-Christian”:¹⁹

St Paul shows us good hope that one day the stubborn Jewish race will be gathered into the fold, and with us will acknowledge the one true shepherd, Jesus. There is yet more reason to hope this of the turks and other barbarian nations, none of whom, I hear, worship idols; on the contrary, they are halfway to Christianity.²⁰

Erasmus, himself far from being in favour of any sort of idolatry, exempts Muslims from this accusation. He also does not, unlike Grotius, direct his anti-scholastic sentiments towards them, rather implying that the Turks would find scholastic discussions—and the quarrels they cause—, to say the least, peculiar:

What will they [sc. the Turks, J.K.] think, what will their feelings be (for though nothing else, they are at least human beings), when they hear these thorny and impenetrable thickets of argument—instances, formalities, quiddities, relativities—particularly when they see so little agreement on them among those eminent religious teachers that they often fight each other until they are pale with fury and reduced to insults and spitting and sometimes even to fisticuffs?²¹

To make these ‘half-Christians’ complete ones must, for Erasmus, be the express goal of a war against

¹⁵ Of course, this does not at all mean that Grotius harbours no ill sentiments towards Judaism; not only does he regard the Talmud as basically nonsense, he also ascribes to Jews a hatred for Christians and invokes a series of other common anti-Jewish notions. Cf. Marc De Wilde, “Offering Hospitality to Strangers: Hugo Grotius’s Draft Regulations for the Jews.” In: *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 85 (2017), pp. 391–433. p. 408.

¹⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, “The Education of a Christian Prince.” In: *Collected Works of Erasmus* (henceforth cited as *CWE*). Vol. 27. Toronto, Buffalo, London 1974ff. pp. 199–288. p. 286.

¹⁷ Cf. Erasmus, “On the Turkish War.” In: *CWE* 64:201–266. p. 220.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 242. Incidentally, an exclamation from the same page—, “And yet all the while, like true Christians, we hate the Turks!”—echoes a better-known one from a letter to Jacob of Hoogstraten of the 11th of August 1519: “If it is Christian to detest the Jews, on this count we are all good Christians, and to spare” (letter 1006 in *Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus*. Letters 993 to 1121 (1519–1520) (= *CWE* 7). pp. 44–54. p. 49).

¹⁹ Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17). p. 233.

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 243.

²¹ Erasmus, “The Handbook of the Christian Soldier.” In: *CWE* 66:1–128. p. 10.

them:

Destroy a Turk to make a Christian, fell an infidel to raise up a true believer: such killing is work of piety fully acceptable to God. Let it therefore be our only goal, our principal preoccupation, to extend the kingdom of Christ rather than our own. Otherwise, to slaughter Turks is simply to increase the kingdom of the dead.²²

As with Grotius and the Jews, the proper way of conversion is by example: “there are probably a good many Turks who are weary of their barbaric tyranny; these last would willingly embrace our faith if they saw a more humane system in the offing”.²³

Judaism, on the other hand, means to Erasmus a more specific threat to Christian piety; in fact, it becomes the term for what he deems “the common plague of all Christianity”,²⁴ that is, the reliance on external ceremonies:

I do not disapprove in any way of the external ceremonies of Christians and the devotions of the simple-minded, especially those that have been approved by the authority of the church, for they are often signs or supports of piety. ... But to worship Christ through visible things for the sake of visible things and to think of this as the summit of religious perfection ... – this would be to desert the law of the gospel, which is spiritual, and to sink into a kind of Judaism ...²⁵

‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’, then, appear as downright opposite terms: “If the Jewish tongue, proponent of carnal rituals and instructions, does not fall silent ... then the tongue of the Gospels, which proclaims grace, may not speak.”²⁶ Accordingly, Shimon Markish describes the relationship between humanist Christianity and Judaism as one between norm and antinorm, a battle which, according to Erasmus, “will never end among Christians”.²⁷

But if this norm exists (what above is called the ideal ‘antiquity,’ infused with the philosophy of Christ), then there must also be an antinorm, equally ideal, and which equally never existed anywhere, at any time, and also is composed of anachronistic and variegated elements. Following the tradition of the early Christians ..., the name of this norm then becomes ‘Judaism’.²⁸

²² Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17), p. 242. Cf. A. G. Weiler, “The Turkish Argument and Christian Piety in Desiderius Erasmus’ *Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (1530).” In: *Erasmus of Rotterdam. The Man and the Scholar*. Ed. by J. Serna Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff. Leiden et al. 1988, pp. 30–39, p. 37: “In these words we find the heart of Erasmus’ idea about a war against the Turks: it should be more of a missionary operation!”—That being said, there is also a more decidedly military aspect in Erasmus’s proposals for the war.

²³ Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17), p. 261. For the argument that Erasmus nevertheless serves as an example of anti-Turkish sentiment by effectively identifying the Turkish as the opposite of humanity altogether, cf. Murad Idris, *War for Peace. Genealogies of a Violent Ideal in Western and Islamic Thought*. New York 2019, pp. 131–177.

²⁴ Erasmus, “The Handbook of the Christian Soldier” (see above, note 21), p. 73.

²⁵ *Op. cit.* pp. 73f.

²⁶ Quote of Erasmus taken from Shimon Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews*. Translated by Anthony Olcott with an afterword by Arthur A. Cohen. Chicago & London 1986, p. 8.

²⁷ Quote of Erasmus taken from *op. cit.* p. 19.

²⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 19. It is perhaps noteworthy that Erasmus himself makes clear that “since the Jews attributed a great deal to bodily observances, I use Judaism to mean not the ungodliness of the Jews but prescriptions concerning external things” (Erasmus, “Clarifications Concerning the Censures Published in Paris in the Name of the Parisian Faculty of Theology.” In: *CWE* 82:16–256, p. 179). Be that as it may, it should be clear from the subject of our paper that we are not interested in how Erasmus views actual Jews but rather how he refers to Judaism to criticise Christians.

Since this battle is being fought “among Christians”, it is clear that Judaism constitutes the foreign and damaging element within Christianity itself—that which, for Christianity to be unified and to God’s liking, would need to be eliminated from Christendom (although the remark that this battle “will never end” implies that Erasmus is not very optimistic in this regard). It is, then, no wonder that, while Erasmus could call the Turks ‘half-Christians’, he would not use the same term when engaging in inner-Christian critique: instead, he calls the convert Pfefferkorn a “half-Jew”.²⁹ Whereas he invites the ‘half-Christian’ Turks in, ‘half-Jews’ like Pfefferkorn should be thrown out.

4. A Shift in Attitude?

We have seen how Grotius virtually equates Roman Catholicism and Islam. (In a way, one could argue, Islam should even be considered less dangerous than Catholicism, seeing as at least the Muslims do not pretend to be Christians, whereas “*easy is the fall from nearby*”.) Roman Catholicism, then, is just as bad, or even worse, than Islam. At Grotius’s time, it is hard to imagine a more decisive exclusion of Catholicism from Christianity; just as Muslims are, in a way, crypto-Catholics, so too can Catholics be called crypto-Muslims, i.e., not Christians at all. The resulting picture is, then, not one of a struggle between dissenting Christians, but of a struggle between Christians and mere pretenders. The Jews, on the other hand, are treated by Grotius as potential Christians; they are relieved of the accusation of idolatry and must be kept close to the Reformed lest they be deterred from their eventual conversion due to the bad example given by the pretenders.

Going back a century to Erasmus, however, the accusations seem to be inverted: Judaism is the epitome of impious ritualism and, understood as such a broad term, everything that is wrong with contemporary Christianity; meanwhile, the barbaric Turks are a divine punishment, but nevertheless, they at least do not indulge in idolatry. They are external foes, not internal; they are a result of pseudo-Christian sinfulness, but not quite as definitive of an embodiment of Christianity’s erroneous ways; they are not, like the Jews, the ‘antinorm’. As such, they might even be considered the touchstone of Christian betterment: surely, if one were to succeed in converting the Muslims, that would be the ultimate proof of Christianity having regained its proper piety.

What could be the cause of this shift in frontiers between allies and foes? A reason could be that, by the time of Grotius, the schism of Western Christianity had already taken place; the hope for a quick reunification had long been betrayed. Quite on the contrary, shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War, the fronts were as hardened as they could possibly be. In this situation, it is only natural for Grotius to get the Jews on board; after all, it is an established fact that Christianity is the successor to Judaism. Drawing a line from Judaism to Reformed Christianity, then, means establishing Reformed Christianity as the true denomination (especially taking into account the eschatological dimensions of Romans 11—after all, in Grotius’s as in Erasmus’s time, there was plenty occasion to be apocalyptically inclined); on the other hand, moving Catholicism away from Judaism means delegitimising it as a denomination of Christianity, pushing it back to the periphery of false and superfluous monotheistic religions like Islam.

²⁹ Letter 713 to Johann Reuchlin of the 15th of November 1517 in *Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus*. Letters 594–841 (1517–1518) (= CWE 5). pp. 203f. p. 204.

For Erasmus, however, the schism in Western Christianity cannot have appeared as definitive. Still hoping for Christian unity, there is no need to rid his enemies of any relation to Christianity whatsoever; since, again, the close relationship of Judaism and Christianity is a given, labelling bad Christians ‘Jewish’ creates less of a distance than Grotius’s identifying them as Islamic. It merely denotes rudiments that Erasmus deems past their expiry date, but it does not remove them from the line ‘Judaism—Christianity’ altogether. Just like the hope for a conversion of the Jews, Erasmus could still hope for his Christian enemies to rediscover the true—that is, of course, Erasmus’s—Christianity. Understood in this way, the shift in enemy attributions between Erasmus and Grotius would also reflect a shift in attitude towards other Christians.

There is a counter-argument against this reading of Erasmus as displaying a more reconciliatory attitude than Grotius that I want to discuss. One could argue that, in Erasmus’s time, calling Christians Jews might even be worse than calling them Muslims if one bears the topos of Jewish deicide in mind. In this interpretation, calling them Jews is not merely a call for them to ‘catch up’ to the true Christian faith, that is, a lament of mere regression, but rather the accusation of actively causing the destruction of Christendom as did the Jews with Christ. After all, looking at Pfefferkorn, the “Jewish poison”³⁰ that he infects Christendom with is the disruption of “the chiefest and best thing in our religion”: “the public unity of the Christian world”.³¹ Nowhere, on the other hand, does Erasmus seem to accuse Pfefferkorn of “worship[ing] Christ through visible things for the sake of visible things”.

So there appear to be in fact at least two different ways in which Erasmus uses the term ‘Jewish’: one is the more specific meaning that we have thus far referred to, that is, “prescriptions concerning external things”; the other is a more general notion of disunity, that is, the *diabolical* aspect, understood literally as creating “calumny”, διαβολή³² (for which the German language offers the literal equivalent *Zerwürfnis*). This second meaning of ‘Judaism’ would match Markish’s description of an ideal antinorm (see above, section III) even better: if unity is the quintessence of what makes Christianity good, then Judaism, as the spreading of discord, is not just un-Christian or not-quite-Christian but decidedly anti-Christian.³³

Seen from the perspective of this more general meaning of ‘Judaism’, Erasmus’s intentions in calling overly ritualistic Christians ‘Jewish’ would be no less harsh than Grotius’s when equating them with Muslims. Far from an attempt to maintain a close relationship, calling his adversaries Jews instead of Muslims could be regarded as a mere consequence of Erasmus not caring enough about Muslims in and of themselves, simply counting them—or more specifically, in this case, the Turks—among the manifold “barbarian nations”³⁴ who, in accordance with Romans 11, are already “halfway to Christianity” compared with the notoriously stubborn Jews.

Even so, I cannot imagine that any Christian who is, in Erasmus’s view, a bit too interested in figurines would instil the same hatred in him as Pfefferkorn’s (supposedly) obvious malevolence, not to

³⁰ Letter 694 to Willibald Pirckheimer on the 2nd of November 1517 in Erasmus, *op. cit.* pp. 164–171. p. 169.

³¹ *Op. cit.* p. 167.

³² Erasmus himself invokes this etymology when seeing the devil at work in Pfefferkorn. Cf. *op. cit.* p. 169.

³³ If that is the case, then it would not surprise me if Erasmus had 2 Thessalonians 2:3f. in mind when thinking about those like Pfefferkorn who were, in his view, responsible for Christian discord: that is, the passages about the Antichrist (actually, the ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, the man of lawlessness) sitting in God’s temple and pretending to act in God’s (Christ’s) name or even as God himself while in fact bringing about the exact opposite.

³⁴ Erasmus, On the Turkish War (see above, note 17). p. 243.

mention justify a call for the “hangman”.³⁵ After all, it was Erasmus who summons us to extend the kingdom of Christ rather than the kingdom of the dead. In the end, he seems to be more interested in reconciling Christendom than in fortifying enemy lines. Meanwhile, Grotius’s describing the “dangerous” Roman Catholics as led by “a notorious enemy of this state” suggests a much less reconciliatory approach.

Thus the point remains that the shift from identifying bad Christians as Jews to identifying them as Muslims is not merely a shift in terminology but also a shift in attitude towards their inner-Christian enemies. With regards to this attitude, the fact that already by Grotius’s time the schism in Western Christianity has proven to be much longer-lasting than anticipated by Erasmus and his contemporaries might play a central role.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to outline Desiderius Erasmus’s and Hugo Grotius’s references to Islam and Judaism when criticising trends in contemporary Christianity, arguing that there has been a shift in enemy lines. I have tried to show how Grotius virtually identifies his major adversaries—that is, Roman Catholics—with Muslims, all the while taking a relatively friendly stance towards Jews, inviting them to accept the truth of Reformed Christianity and hoping to convert them (and to keep them away from the Catholics) by good example. For Erasmus, conversely, ‘Judaism’ seems to serve as a name for the epitome of ritualism and idolatry, “the common plague of all Christianity” consisting in preferring “carnal rituals and instructions” over spiritual devotion; whereas the Turks (here taken, for want of a more direct treatment of the subject, as *pars pro toto* for Muslims) are portrayed as “half-Christians” free from idolatry, happily ready to convert when presented with the example of a good Christian and just as baffled by contemporary inner-Christian quarrels as Erasmus himself. Finally, I have tried to argue for the possibility that this shift in attributions reflects a shift in attitude towards intrareligious enemies: While Erasmus—regardless of exactly how damning the label ‘Jewish’ is for him in a specific case—still put the unity of Christendom before all else, Grotius seemed to show little leniency for Christians who dared to be Catholic. One possible reason for this might be that, by the time of Grotius’s writing, the schism in Western Christianity had only become sharper and sharper with no reconciliation in sight; in particular, shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War, there seemed to be little inclination to show the other side any particular kindness, whereas getting the Jews on board could further help legitimising Reformed Christianity in its claim to be the only truly Christian denomination.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Edwin Rabbie for nominating my essay for publication in the ESJP and for welcoming me to his course; he gave me the pleasant opportunity of occupying myself with two famous Dutch thinkers and contributed significantly to me enjoying my studies abroad at EUR. In addition, I would like to give thanks to Lena Schots for her tireless support before and during my stay, and to Stefanie Erthner back in Berlin for also helping me arrange my studies at EUR. Furthermore, I

³⁵ Letter 694 to Willibald Pirckheimer on the 2nd of November 1517 (see above, note 30). p. 170.

want to express my gratitude to the German Academic Scholarship Foundation without whose financial support I would not have been able to enjoy my exchange so easily. Lastly, I want to thank the referees who reviewed my essay for the ESJP and more than once provided me with helpful comments, and to Sven Hogervorst for the highly enjoyable communication during the process.

Julian Kiefer, born 1994 in Cologne, first studied Philosophy, Linguistics and History and is now pursuing a Master's degree in Philosophy at Freie Universität Berlin, where he engages himself chiefly in German Idealism, Philosophy of History and Political Theology with a speciality in thoroughly disregarding paper deadlines and length limits.

References

- Erasmus, Desiderius. "Clarifications Concerning the Censures Published in Paris in the Name of the Parisian Faculty of Theology." In: *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 82. Toronto, Buffalo, London 2012. pp. 16–256.
- . *The Correspondence of Erasmus. Letters 594–841 (1517–1518)* (= *Collected Works of Erasmus. Vol. 5*). Toronto, Buffalo, London 1979.
- . *The Correspondence of Erasmus. Letters 993 to 1121 (1519–1520)* (= *Collected Works of Erasmus. Vol. 7*). Toronto, Buffalo, London 1987.
- . "The Education of a Christian Prince." In: *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 27. Toronto, Buffalo, London 1986. pp. 199–288.
- . "The Handbook of the Christian Soldier." In: *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 66. Toronto, Buffalo, London 1988. pp. 1–128.
- . "On the Turkish War." In: *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 64. Toronto, Buffalo, London 2005. pp. 201–266.
- Grotius, Hugo: *Remonstrantie of 1615*. Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis. Ed. by David Kromhout and Adri K. Offenbergh. Translated into English by Cid van Heertum. Leiden & Boston 2019.
- . *The Truth of the Christian Religion*. Corrected, and illustrated with notes, by Mr. Le Clerc. Translated by John Clarke, D.D. New Edition. London 1829.
- Hearing, J. P.: *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion. A Study of his Work De veritate religionis christianae (1640)*. Translated by J. C. Grayson. Leiden & Boston 2004.
- Idris, Murad: *War for Peace. Genealogies of a Violent Ideal in Western and Islamic Thought*. New York 2019.
- Markish, Shimon: *Erasmus and the Jews*. Translated by Anthony Olcott with an afterword by Arthur A. Cohen. Chicago & London 1986.
- Weiler, A. G.: "The Turkish Argument and Christian Piety in Desiderius Erasmus 'Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo' (1530)." In: *Erasmus of Rotterdam. The Man and the Scholar*. Ed. by J. Sperna Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff. Leiden et al. 1988. pp. 30–39.
- De Wilde, Marc: "Offering Hospitality to Strangers: Hugo Grotius's Draft Regulations for the Jews." In: *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 85 (2017). pp. 391–433.



A Phenomenological Defence of Radical Re-evaluation

Luc Middelkoop

Introduction

The everydayness of moral judgements and beliefs makes them so pervasive that we are hardly ever wondered by them. In our time more than ever, it is common for a large number of people to speak out on the many different forms of global media about injustice.¹ And yet, it seems to become more difficult to recognise the special nature of morality. That is, as we proclaim our judgements more and more, it becomes harder to experience the wonder of their origin. Philosophy could help us. Metaethics for instance, understood as philosophical research into the nature of moral properties and their relation to beliefs and judgements, is a way of wondering about normative ethical claims. Most of the contemporary debate that identifies with this name is practiced by analytic philosophers, as is attested by the theories dealt with in the introductions to metaethics by Andrew Fisher and Steven Miller.² The wondering about normative ethical claims that is practiced within this debate is, however, quite different from what I wish to achieve. Their aim is to determine on what basis ethical judgements of a subject could be correct from within an already present understanding of the relation between us and the world. In contrast, wonder helps us reach the origin of morality because it lets us experience the uniqueness of there being a value rich universe in the first place. I will base my paper on Taylor's view on the moral self. It will require some work to bring to light the unarticulated metaethical position that it harbours. In doing so, I hope to provide an account that can help the contemporary metaethical debate reach a broader perspective. One which goes beyond the dry wondering about normative ethics by recovering a sense of wonder and traversing to a more original questioning.

Taylor's argumentation in favour of the responsibility of a continuous radical re-evaluation of our evaluations provides the starting point of this inquiry. Taylor presents his position in "Responsibility for Self",³ but seems to leave out a lot of the arguments required to make his position plausible. In this chapter he denies the existence of a universally correct yardstick, on the basis of which we could determine the correctness of ethical claims. Additionally, he also holds that this implies that we have a responsibility to re-evaluate our ethical judgements. My aim is to develop the phenomenological arguments that Taylor must draw on to be able to defend this position in more detail than he does himself. Phenomenology is here understood as the method of leading our 'understanding' back from our ordinary apprehension of beings to that which makes this possible.⁴ This is what I will attempt to do throughout this paper. By using the explication of Taylor's position as a waypoint, I hope to make headway towards a new perspective in the metaethical debate. This interpretation, while inspired by

¹ See for instance this collection of twitter responses to Donald Trump's threatening of Iran: Mary Papenfuss, "Twitter Critics Explode Over Trump's Threatened "War Crimes" In Iran", HuffPost, 38:33 500, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/twitter-donald-trump-war-crimes-threat_n_5c113f6fc5b6b5a713bb382d.

² Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Durham: Acumen, 2011); Alexander Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction*, 2 edition (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2013).

³ Chapter 12 in *The Identities of Persons*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg. Topics in Philosophy ; 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976

⁴ Heidegger explicitly distances his method from Husserl's, see: Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 21/28-29.

Dreyfus and Taylor's book *Retrieving Realism*, goes beyond their project.⁵ The main difference is that I identify primordial attunement as the origin of the possibility of standing in a specific position within the open realm in which entities can present themselves as meaningful. What this means will become clearer as I develop the argument in more detail.

I have divided my questioning into the phenomenological arguments that Taylor requires for his position on the moral self into two subquestions. The first question is the following: *how* is Taylor able to claim that there is no universally correct yardstick to determine the correctness of our moral evaluations? The second question is: *why* does the lack of a universal yardstick imply that we have a responsibility to radically re-evaluate our evaluations? I will answer the how-question by arguing that Taylor should hold the more elaborate position that morality springs from a value rich world, which we primarily understand non-conceptually. Answering the why-question will boil down to showing how the phenomenological argumentation needed to answer the first question makes it possible to defend the idea that there is a multiplicity of valid perspectives. The responsibility for a continuous re-evaluation of our evaluations follows from the lack of a universally correct yardstick. Without such a yardstick we are unable to determine the right way of being moral. Continuous radical re-evaluation indicates a state of openness in which we are able to see reality afresh and become open to new ways of living. In this paper I will be defending these answers.

I start out, in section 1, by discussing Taylor's rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice. Proponents of this theory hold that it is up to every individual subject to determine the meaning of the world by choosing what to do. It will become clear that Taylor rejects Sartre's position because the radical choice can only be made on the basis of a more basic level of strong evaluation that it ignores. 'Strong evaluation' is a technical term that Taylor uses to describe our sensitivity to the meaningfulness of the world.⁶ Once this has been established, I will discuss Taylor's claim that we have a responsibility to ourselves to radically re-evaluate our strong evaluations. At the end of the section, we will be able to grasp Taylor's position and see that he is not able to defend it adequately with the arguments he presents in his paper.

In section 2, I will focus on *how* we can enable Taylor to claim that there is no yardstick. I will do so by addressing the philosophical commitments that can be drawn from his critique of Sartre. The commitments will turn out to be: the primacy of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and the importance of primordial attunement (*Befindlichkeit*). These are terms introduced by Heidegger through his phenomenological method, understood as the bringing back of everyday experience to its authenticity. At the end of this section, I draw on a Gibsonian account of affordances to show how perspective-relative affordances can exist without reducing their meaning to subjective experiences. I rely on Gibson to present a very clear range of phenomena that support the relation between the generality of primordial attunement and the specificity of attunement (*Stimmung*).

In section 3, I will bring the phenomenological arguments of section 2 together and discuss *why* it follows that we have a responsibility to radically re-evaluate our evaluations. Since the individual is usually bound by a limited pre-given perspective, the responsibility to radically re-evaluate one's

⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁶ Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self", in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg, Topics in Philosophy ; 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

evaluations articulates our responsibility to be able to be flexible enough to re-interpret our understanding of the world. This answer to the why-question will help us see how this metaethical position moves towards a retrieval of a sense of wonder. It will help us reach an experience of the uniqueness of our position within the world.

Finally, in section 4, I go over a possible solution to the problem of an ‘anything goes’ morality that might be implied by this position. The problem might be formulated as follows: if there are no universally correct rules for determining the value of an action, does it not follow that every action becomes permissible? Having determined the structure of the argument in answering the why-question, I try to establish that morality flows from a shared world in which we take a perspective.

1. Taylor’s rejection of Sartre as a preparatory analysis

In the previously mentioned chapter “Responsibility for Self”, Taylor argues that what he calls *simple weighing* requires a more fundamental level of *strong evaluation*. Simple weighing is, according to Taylor, determining what to do by weighing the pros and cons of alternative actions.⁷ It is reflectively determining which alternative is best suited to satisfy one’s desires. Taylor contrasts simple weighing with strong evaluation, which he describes as deploying “a language of evaluative contrasts ranging over desires”.⁸ So, to decide what action one should undertake, the simple weigher would try to determine as many of the factual consequences of each alternative and their relation to her desires. In contrast, the strong evaluator uses a vocabulary that, after ‘reflection’ on her being drawn to one action over another, touches on the reasons why she is drawn to choose a particular alternative. By employing strong evaluative language, a moral agent is trying to describe why a specific action would fit into a life worth living. One should think of words such as ‘noble’, ‘worthy’, ‘just’ and ‘uncivilised’ as instances of the use of strong evaluative language. The point Taylor is trying to make, is that simple weighing can only be done on the basis of more the fundamental strong evaluations. We will now look into the argument Taylor provides in favour of this position.

Towards the end of the chapter, Taylor turns to an example of a moral dilemma that Sartre has put forth in *L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme* as a phenomenon in support of his theory of radical choice. In this example a young man is torn between staying home, so he can care for his sick mother, and joining the resistance to help free his country. According to Sartre, the young man is mistaken when he claims that his feelings will show him the right decision, for it is the choice that determines the meaningfulness of the action.⁹ This dilemma is supposed to show that it is impossible to solely rely on values when determining which action one should perform. The boy is only able to choose one alternative over the other by making a radical choice that determines the value of the options through the choice itself. The choice is, for this reason, ultimately up to the young man. As he makes the radical choice, he determines the meaning of the options that he faced in the dilemma.

Taylor responds to Sartre in the following way:

A cruel dilemma indeed. But it is a dilemma only because the claims themselves are not created by

⁷ Taylor, 287.

⁸ Taylor, 287.

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 32.

radical choice. If they were, the grievous nature of the predicament would dissolve, for that would mean that the young man could do away with the dilemma at any moment by simply declaring one of the rival claims as dead and inoperative.¹⁰

According to Taylor, the problem with the theory of radical choice is that the value of the alternatives that make the choice into a dilemma becomes irrelevant if overcoming the dilemma is simply a case of choosing one action over the other. Even though Taylor does not state this, I believe that the core of the argument against Sartre must be that he mistakenly grounds all reasons for choosing in the subject. Consequently, the subject becomes the judge of the meaning and moral weight of all actions. If the subject is indeed the ultimate judge, then it becomes unfathomable how a moral dilemma could arise in the first place. An individual could just as easily dissolve the dilemma by exerting the same powers through which the dilemma came to be. This is what Taylor suggests by claiming that the boy only experiences a dilemma because the moral worth of both options was not decided by him. It is precisely because the moral value of the world is not up to the individual that such a moral dilemma can arise. On the basis of this interpretation of Sartre, Taylor concludes that the theory of radical choice veils that a moral dilemma can arise exclusively if non-subject determined strong evaluations pull us with an equally strong force. Put differently, the need for a radical choice can only arise because we are strong evaluators.

Taylor's refutation of Sartre's theory of radical choice shows how simple weighing can only be done as a derivative mode of strong evaluation. A moral dilemma arises because we are sensitive to the moral value of both options, which is a way of saying that we stand in their light. When we translate this into the distinction between simple weighing and strong evaluation, we see that simple weighing also cannot account for the need to weigh our options at all. Weighing pros and cons leaves out the strong evaluations that are the basis for valuing one action over the other. When decision making is mistakenly understood in this way, the act of evaluating alternative actions is reduced to a derivative weighing of desires and consequences. Since the meaning of these desires and consequences are then grounded in a subject, it falls victim to the same kind of subjectivism as is implied by Sartre's theory of radical choice. Strong evaluation is, however, a way of recognising the values that reveal themselves without having the subject as its cause. Herein lies the distinction between the mode of action of the subject that determines what she should do on the basis of radical choice/simple weighing, and, on the other hand, *human being* as the sensitivity to the pull of its world.

The key passage in which Taylor discusses the responsibility to radically re-evaluate our evaluations, is the following:

If I am questioning whether smuggling a radio into the country is honest, or I am judging everything by the utilitarian criterion, then I have a yardstick, a definite yardstick. But if I go to the radical questioning, then it is not exactly that I have no yardstick, in the sense that anything goes, but rather that what takes the place of the yardstick is my deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate and which I am trying to bring to definition. I am trying to see reality afresh from more adequate categories to describe it.¹¹

¹⁰ Taylor, "Responsibility for Self", 291.

¹¹ Taylor, 298.

Taylor understands radical questioning as the ‘questioning’ of one’s strong evaluations without a definite yardstick to guide the questioning. It is, thus, the evaluation of my evaluations without the usage of a principle to determine their correctness. Taylor contrasts radical re-evaluation with a lingual case in which the use of the word ‘honest’ is the yardstick. If I know the rules for the usage of ‘honest’, then I know if the action is honest or not. The utilitarian is also bound by a predetermined yardstick, since she has accepted a specific theoretical criterium that serves this purpose. Namely, the principle that an action is good as long as it maximises wellbeing. Radical questioning, on the other hand, goes beyond the employment of a concrete yardstick and relies on a deep and unstructured sense of what is important. It is only from out of the radical questioning that we can see reality from a previously unknown perspective. Radical questioning brings us into contact with the condition of the possibility of a concrete yardstick. Radical re-evaluation is therefore not about determining principles that can help us reach such a universally correct yardstick: one that is correct for everybody. It is about seeing reality afresh and being open to the multiplicity of interpretations from which a concrete yardstick follows. What remains altogether unclear is how it follows from the fact that strong evaluations are presupposed in any kind of simple weighing that there is no universally correct yardstick. The aim of the following section is to determine *how* Taylor would be able to defend this claim. By following his argumentation discussed above, I will determine the philosophical commitments and the argument required to defend Taylor’s position in more detail.

While linguistic practices and theoretical standpoints cannot form the basis of a universally correct yardstick, Taylor continues, it is not a case of ‘anything goes’. Instead, *because there is no ultimately correct yardstick*, we have the responsibility to use our “deepest unstructured sense of what is important” to be open to new ways of evaluation.¹² The second question that remains unanswered is: *why?* Why does it follow from the inexistence of a universally correct yardstick that we have a responsibility to radically re-evaluate our evaluations? It is important to note that Taylor does quote Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein as the being for which being is an issue.¹³ This is certainly a first step, since it points to an understanding of the human being as determined by ever changing possibilities. It is, however, still a long way removed from being a convincing account of why this would lead to the responsibility to radically evaluate one’s evaluation without the help of a concrete yardstick.

2. How Taylor could be able to deny the existence of a universally correct yardstick

I will now try to determine the arguments Taylor requires to defend the idea that there is no universally correct yardstick in the first place. This will be achieved by discussing the following two notions: I will first deal with the *primacy of being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein)* and secondly with *primordial attunement (Befindlichkeit)* as the basis for significance.

Taylor’s rejection of Sartre’s position rests on the idea that the subject is not the origin of the significance of the world. To support this argument Taylor could draw on Heidegger’s understanding of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) as the most basic level on the basis of which beings are understood. For my purposes it is most effective to briefly sketch the distinction between beings that are ready-to-

¹² Taylor, 298.

¹³ Taylor, 299.

hand (*zuhause*) and beings that are present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) to make clear how being-in-the-world is primary and to illustrate the ontological difference.¹⁴

Readiness-to-hand (*Zubandenheit*) is the mode of being of beings that receive their intelligibility from our goal driven involvement with them.¹⁵ When I am taking notes during a lecture, I do not notice my pen. I just write down the things that draw me to write them down. The pen is ready-to-hand because I transparently utilise it by drawing on my familiarity with the world. Besides this, my activity and the tools that I use during this activity can only be understood through my familiarity with the referential totality in which they have their place. That is, writing down notes with a pen is only intelligible because I am familiar with being a student. In addition, it requires that I am familiar with the tools I need as a student, such as pens, notebooks and blackboards. The significance of this referential totality, by which I mean both its meaning and importance, requires that I am working towards a certain goal. In this case, I am undertaking this activity for the sake of learning.

Even so, it could happen that, while writing down an interesting aspect of what the teacher has just said, my pen refuses to cooperate. It could be out of ink or have gotten damaged somehow. In this case, I will be pulled out of my engaged activity and I will need to investigate why my pen is no longer functioning properly before I am able to re-engage in my activity. I will need to take note of its characteristics in order to determine why it is malfunctioning and to determine possible ways of fixing it. The way of being of the pen has now gone to presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*).¹⁶

The structure of this simple phenomenon is a good example of most of the phenomenological arguments used throughout the first part of *Sein und Zeit*. There is a phenomenologically determined ontological level. A level arrived at by leading concrete dealings with beings back to an ontological structure that makes the dealings possible. This case illustrates how a pen can have two different modes of being, or different ways of presenting itself, namely readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. The phenomenological description thus shows that there is more to the pen than just its properties as a being, for it also has a certain mode in which it gives itself. The pen, as a being, is what Heidegger calls the ontic level. The mode in which the pen is made intelligible is called the ontological level. This is the primary distinction between being (ontological) and beings (ontic), named by the *ontological difference* (*Ontologische Differenz*).¹⁷

In preparation for the third section it is important to see that readiness-to-hand is the more basic level of intelligibility. Beings are firstly understood on the basis of one's familiarity with these beings grounded in the totality of interconnected meanings that give beings their significance. The example of using a pen to write down notes during a lecture is supposed to show that the significance of an activity is governed by a specific goal that is to be achieved without representing the condition of satisfaction. I call this 'care-driven involvement', for it captures both the goal driven nature of the activity, while also making clear that it is non-representational. So, the world is first and foremost understood on the basis of our care-driven involvement, expressed in its way of being as readiness-to-hand. Yet, we can also deal with objects through observation and reflection. In this stance we take beings as present-at-hand

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), 69–70.

¹⁵ Heidegger, 71.

¹⁶ While I am aware of the intermediate phenomenon of unhandiness (*Unzuhauseheit*), I am leaving out this distinction because it might over complicate matters without bringing anything more to the table.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Johan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 4-6/6-7.

objects with properties. A natural occurrence of this phenomenon is breakdown cases that force us out of our engaged dealing. Such cases require that we put ourselves over against the world, so we can observe entities and their properties.

Now we are in a position to work towards the importance of being-in-the-world. The phenomenological account of using a pen provides an insightful example that can help us to understand this. In the lecture example, the pen is significantly present in mode of being as it is being used. What remains unanswered is the condition of the possibility of the pen showing itself in its significance. In other words, what makes being, as that on the basis of which entities are understood, possible? This leads us to the more basic question than just the way in which being makes beings intelligible. This question is described by Heidegger as an inquiry into the occurrence of being.¹⁸

One way of grasping the possibility of the understanding of being is through understanding what Heidegger means with his statement that our existence as being-in-the-world is the presupposition of apprehension.¹⁹ In this statement, existence should not be understood as the existence of an extant entity. Instead, Heidegger is referring to the Latin meaning of the word ‘*ex-sistere*’, which translates to ‘standing-beyond’. According to Heidegger, human beings have already stepped out beyond themselves, as being-in-the-world.²⁰ Consider the following passage:

When we talk in an ontically figurative way about the *lumen naturale* in human being, we mean nothing other than the existential-ontological structure of this being, that it *is* one with the open. To say that it is “illuminated” means that it is cleared in itself as being-in-the-world, not by another being, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing.²¹

In this passage, Heidegger writes that, when understood according to the existential structure of *being-in-the-world*, talking of the human being as natural light means that we are one with the open space in which beings show themselves. Here Heidegger explicitly distances himself from all thinking that starts from a subject that enters into a universe of objects and gives it meaning by having subjective experiences. Since Heidegger holds that we are our world “*existingly*”, being-in-the-world is rather a case of *being-the-world*.²²

We have come to an understanding of being-in-the-world as a way of saying that we are (in) the openness in which beings receive their presence. What remains unexplained is how we are able to be affected by these beings as they present themselves in a specific way. In order to provide an answer, we need an understanding of *primordial attunement* (*Befindlichkeit*) as the ontological structure that enables us to be sensitive to the meaningful aspects of the world.²³ Let us briefly look at another passage from *Sein und Zeit* in which Heidegger characterises this:

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 44.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 164.

²⁰ Heidegger, 170.

²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, 125/133. (slightly edited the translation)

²² Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 364.

²³ I use ‘*Befindlichkeit*’ here because this is the word Heidegger uses to indicate the ontological structure that makes significance possible. The fact that both ‘*Befindlichkeit*’ and ‘*Stimmung*’ get translated as ‘attunement’ make it slightly harder to clearly differentiate between the ontological structure and its ontic expression in the individual. For this reason, I will, from now on, use ‘primordial attunement’ for the ontological structure and ‘attunement’ for the ontic instance in individuals.

But being affected by the unserviceable, resistant, and threatening character of things at hand is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can *matter* to it. This mattering to it is grounded in attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), and as attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) it has disclosed the world... The moodedness of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) constitutes existentially the openness to the world of Dasein.²⁴

This passage provides an understanding of a structural relation between primordial attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and attunement (*Stimmung*) as the condition of the possibility of being affected by the world. Primordial attunement is the way in which we have always already been brought before ourselves, in a specific place within the open.²⁵ Heidegger also calls the formal structure of attunement “affective self-finding”.²⁶ So, as an affective self-finding, the individual finds herself in a specific place and in a specific mood and, in this manner, becomes an individual. The affective self-finding, called primordial attunement, makes possible the specific attunements *with* meaningfully present beings. It is the condition of the possibility of being attuned to the world.

The instances of attunement of the individual should be understood as a resonating with the world. To make this clearer I will briefly present Gibson’s theory of *affordances*. Gibson works out his theory of affordances in *An Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* by providing analyses of the interaction between an animal and its environment. Even though Gibson does not position himself with regard to Heidegger’s work, his theory will be able to show how attunement is intertwined with action and how it is also perspective-relative. Especially the second aspect will turn out to be important if we want to show *how* Taylor is able to claim that there is no universally correct yardstick. According to Gibson, our perception of the world consists of affordances, a pre-conceptual understanding of what a specific object or situation affords us.²⁷ I understand the relation between attunement and affordances as one in which being able to perceive affordances is being attuned to the significance of what is perceived.

The significance of the world is dependent on the perspective from which one perceives. When my phone rings I am drawn to pick it up. This is due to, for instance, my familiarity with the ringtone I use. When another phone rings with a different ringtone, or someone has changed mine without my knowledge, it does not afford picking-up. The situation can also alter the affordance. If my phone rings when I am in a lecture, it is more likely that my first response would be to try to stop my phone from ringing as soon as possible. This shows that the same perception, my phone ringing, can afford a different action depending on the situation. And, of course, when *my* phone rings, it usually does not afford picking-up or silencing-it-as-soon-as-possible to other individuals. Just like the culturally determined familiarity is a structural aspect of being-in-the-world, affordances are also largely structured by the cultural and social practices. Why I am drawn to stop my phone from ringing as soon as possible can only be understood when we are attuned to the norms of the culture with regard to taking part in a lecture. The same goes for the significance of all sorts of actions, situations, character

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, 129/137.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 135.

²⁶ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 282.

²⁷ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1986), 119.

traits, religious practices, etc. Here perspective means more than just the physical position from which a bodily subject perceives the world. While this is certainly one dimension, it is also used to indicate the relation between meaningful presence and the sensitivity required to bring it to light.

There are two key aspects of attunement that should be kept in mind. First of all, primordial attunement makes it possible for things to matter. Secondly, because the individual is attuned to the world from a specific perspective, the same objectively present being can solicit a variety of responses. I used Gibson's account of affordances as a blueprint for a concrete phenomenon that shows that it is possible for a situation to afford a multiplicity of perspective-relative responses. His theory makes evident how attunement could be perspective-relative, without being a subjective experience. However, Gibson does not have the ontological level, indicated by primordial attunement, that is required for an experience to be had. His theory is, in that sense, only complementary.

Now that I have established what it means to say that being-in-the-world is the ontologically most basic way of being and that (primordial) attunement is the basis for significance, I have provided the arguments Taylor requires for his rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice. Before I move on, I would like to briefly discuss the similarity between the form of Taylor's and Heidegger's argumentation. In doing so it will become clear how being-in-the-world and attuned affordances fit into Taylor's position.

The structure of Taylor's argument against Sartre is identical to the structure that Heidegger uses to show the primacy of being-in-the-world. We saw that, in response to the moral dilemma Sartre uses to argue for his theory of radical choice, Taylor responded by noting that the moral dilemma is only a dilemma because there is a pull towards both alternative actions which does not originate from a subject. Now that we know how action and attunement are related, we see that the young man is drawn to perform both actions because he is attuned to the morally relevant aspects of each alternative action. They matter to him and draw him in, not because he has determined their meaning by exerting his own will, but because he is sensitive to their significance. Articulating this pull by using specific language is what Taylor calls strong evaluation. The need for a radical choice shows that we normally lucidly respond to the affordances of the situation. Furthermore, the brief analysis of being-in-the-world showed that we are primarily dealing with the world in an unreflective way that only collapses when something breaks down (or if we deliberately thematise the world). The young man's inability to rely on his attuned grasp of the world is a kind of breakdown. Because of the breakdown, he resorts to a simple weighing of the objective consequences of both actions without taking account of the strong evaluations that turn it into a dilemma. It is like determining the objective features of the pen in order to repair it. The action can only be performed on the basis of a more basic familiarity with the world, but, at the same time, loses sight of this 'fact'.

3. Why do we have a responsibility to re-evaluate our evaluations?

In the previous section I have provided the phenomenological arguments required to show *how* Taylor is able to support his rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice. I have argued that he needs an understanding of being-in-the-world to maintain that we are not the origin of the meaningfulness of the world. This requires a Heideggerian account of (primordial) attunement to explain the embeddedness of the individual within a shared open realm. I paired this with an understanding of a

Gibsonian account of affordances to make evident how a limited amount of meaningful aspects is experienced from a perspective, without turning them into subjective experiences. With the help of these arguments, I will now determine *why* it should follow that there is no universally correct yardstick.

The key to understanding Taylor's rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice is seeing that it is a rejection of the idea that the meaningfulness of the world is grounded in a subject. If it were solely up to the will of a subject, there would be no dilemma. A further development and clarification of this claim requires that we combine being-in-the-world and (primordial) attunement. Combining these enables us to claim that strong evaluations *are* articulations of attunement, of significance. For instance, when I use strong evaluative language to articulate why I always cycle to my part-time job, I formulate how this way of living my life is more worthy than one in which I do not care about the effects of my actions on the environment. As soon as the condition of the possibility of the existence of meaningful presence transcends the subject-object distinction, meaning is wrested from the subject and brought into the open. Strong evaluation should, therefore, be understood as an articulation of the significance of the world.

It is an important aspect of the referential totality, in which practices and beings form the basis of the intelligibility of the world, that it is not constituted by the will of individuals. Consider the meaningful sphere of educational practices. Very early in our lives we enter into the educational system, become students, have teachers, use different kinds of equipment and perform these tasks for a specific purpose. These education practices have existed and have had their meaning before an individual enters into them. In this sense, the pen that I use to write down notes during a lecture is granted to me. Not because I received the object from someone else, but because it can be meaningfully present to me only by entering into a referential totality.

It is certainly true that a specific configuration of this whole can shift. Practices can change. Using a pen to write down notes is not as common as thirty years ago. Today different equipment, such as laptops and tablets, has taken its place and has received meaningful presence within this sphere of intelligibility. Changes of this kind are changes of relations within a referential totality that are tightly connected with human behaviour. What remains unchanged is that the referential totality is required to grant meaning to the world of educational practices.

This also goes for our attunement to morally relevant aspects of situations. I have already established that strong evaluations are not constituted by subjectivity, understood in the traditional sense. Strong evaluation, understood on the basis of my interpretation of (primordial) attunement, is the recognition of a meaningful aspect of the world. Recognising a meaningful aspect makes it possible to bring it into the open, out of the hidden richness of the world. This means that we are neither the source of meaningful presence nor the source of its significance. When Taylor employs the word 'yardstick', I want to think of it as one instance of a possible organisation of background practices that ground our understanding of the world. A specific structuring of the referential totality is an instance of an 'implicit' yardstick that lets us make strong evaluations. We can articulate the strong evaluations embedded in our culture, or specific practices, because they structure our relation to the world on a more basic level than the objective world consisting of objects with properties.

While the background is the invisible enabling condition of our understanding of the world, it does not immediately follow that it is inarticulable. If the background is like the illumination in the room, in

that it allows us to see the objects in the room without seeing the light itself, then this does not mean that it is impossible to turn our attention to it. One can argue that this also goes for the moral background that structures our relation to this aspect of the world. If strong evaluations are indeed an expression of worldly significance, then they are, in some sense, expressions of the background on the basis of which the world offers itself in a certain way. Moral dilemmas are interesting cases in which it suddenly becomes important why we choose one action over another. It forces one to become clear about the worthiness of what the dilemma is about. Reckoning with such questions is already a way of trying to formulate the background of intelligibility on the basis of which the worthiness presents itself.

Now we are in a position to say clearly *why* there would be a responsibility to radically re-evaluate one's evaluations. If the individual is first and foremost in a world that is full of meaning, then the only yardstick available is the one present within the practices. However, if strong evaluations are articulations of attunements which can only occur on a background of intelligibility, then there is no way of determining whether any yardstick is ultimately correct. Because we have already established that being-in-the-world is the origin of intelligibility, we have to conclude that there are no principles that are not first drawn from the understanding grounded in being-in-the-world. Correctness can thus only exist within a pre-given background on the basis of which beings present themselves in a certain way. This does not mean that we should take everything for granted. We do not want to say that it would have been fine to continue with slavery practices, simply because there is no universally correct yardstick that we can use to show how it is objectively wrong to do so. Instead, and this is *why* Taylor calls upon us to radically re-evaluate our evaluations, we need to be open to new ways of evaluation, precisely so that we can go beyond the pre-established yardstick expressed in the background for our practices. The responsibility for radical re-evaluation is an indication of the need for an openness to new ways of living, which specifically follows from the fact that there is no universally right way of doing things.

This is a retrieval of wonder. When we see the wonder of intelligibility and accept our dependence on it, we become one with who we are. We come to stand in the realm in which the world is able to show itself, not as unbending subjects, but as beings who are sensitive enough to recognise what they owe thanks to. Once we recognise the finitude of our understanding, we are able to overcome established practices and 'see reality afresh'.

4. Against an 'anything goes' morality

In the following paragraphs I will develop a strategy for showing how Taylor's position does not necessarily imply an 'anything goes' morality. This requires that we stress that the subject is not the source of the meaning of the world. While discussing Gibson's theory of affordances, I noted that affordances are always experienced *from a perspective*. The same goes for attunement, meaningfulness can only matter to an individual if it originates from within the open. Both positions see that meaning is intimately connected with the way a group or an individual interacts with the world, without reducing it to mere subjective experience. Using a pen to write down notes brings out a meaningful dimension of the pen that only exists through the interaction between the pen and its utilisation by an individual.

The basic idea is sketched by Merleau-Ponty when he gives a phenomenological account of gazing across a landscape with a friend. Merleau-Ponty writes that at no moment he feels that he is a captive of his own private world and that, when his friend points at a church in the distance, he does not point to

“the church for him”, but points to the church out there to which they are both open.²⁸ It is surely the case that they both experience the church from a different perspective, however, the phenomenon is used to make evident that they both experience the *same* church from a perspective. When combined with the argumentation in section 2, this example points to our always already being (in) the world, or the open. Affective self-finding brings us into a shared world and makes it possible to be attuned to the world from a perspective.

The next step is to explain, using this basic idea that we all experience the same world from a perspective, how it is possible that individuals have different strong evaluations of the same situation, without reducing strong evaluations to arbitrary subjective experiences. I will propose that we are attuned to *genuine* aspects of a shared situations, from a perspective.

Think of a spectacular summer’s day on which everyone is going out for a drink, meeting new people and having a wonderful time. While the overall shared mood is happy and outgoing, I could be sullenly walking through town. Suppose that this is caused by the smokers throwing their cigarettes on the ground. Additionally, I see one of my friends, who has money problems, having a drink while he cannot afford it. My specific perspectival attunement is not attuned to the shared happy and outgoing mood, but my ‘experience’ of the situation is not the product of a subjective filter that colours the situation either. Instead, I am attuned to *genuine* aspects of the shared situation. The point of this example is to show that it is possible for different people to be in touch with different aspects of the same situation, without making the value of the situation rely solely on the subject. ‘Genuine’ does not mean that a subject has a representation that corresponds to an aspect of a situation. It is rather a way of saying that the world is experienced directly but gives itself partially. It *is* worrisome that a friend is drinking who cannot actually afford it and it *is* enjoyable to be drinking with friends on a hot summer’s day. Such claims can only be made because our specific relation to the world discloses these aspects. Since we are attuned beings, that always find themselves in a specific situation and in a specific mood, the world always offers itself in a specific way. A situation can afford different valuations without contradicting each other because meaningful presence requires that we, first of all, stand in the open. As we become individuals through affective self-finding, we come to stand in a perspective *in* the open. A perspective from which certain aspects of the world show themselves, while others remain concealed.

If we make the same move as I sketched above, we could argue that different strong evaluations indicate different genuine morally relevant aspects of a shared world. The dissimilarity between this move and the arguments above is that the aspects of the situation that I am attuned to can be grounded in an objectively present world. Everybody will agree that there are people who throw their cigarettes on the ground and there is a friend who is spending money even though he needs to pay his rent. When making the same move to defend the non-arbitrariness of strong evaluations, there must be a realm of morally relevant aspects that grounds the strong evaluations and makes it possible for different understandings to value them in different valid ways.

This problem can be dealt with by showing that leading a human life presupposes a shared moral sphere in which a multiplicity of perspectives can reside. An instance of such an argument can be found in Nussbaum’s *Non-Relative Virtues*. The point of her essay is to argue that there is a nominal description

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 428–29.

of the Aristotelian virtues. Nominal descriptions of the Aristotelian virtues are neutral because they only indicate a sphere of necessary experiences in any human life. In her paper she presents a list that is supposed to show how necessary dimensions of human experience imply that any culture has to take a stand on them.²⁹ These necessary dimensions of experience could provide the grounding that strong evaluations need in order to be genuine aspects of human life for these cultures. This leaves us with the question of how different relations to these spheres of experience can be more than arbitrary judgements when there is no yardstick to determine their correctness.

A preliminary answer can be drawn from the primacy of being-in-the-world. If, as a precondition of every kind of perspective, one must first be in the open, then that 'opens up' the possibility for claiming that the world can grant itself in multiple ways. Strong evaluation could, in principle, be an expression of *genuine aspects of the moral sphere of human life that are experienced from a perspective*.

Let us briefly go over one example on Nussbaum's list to show how this might solve the problem. One dimension of the sphere that Nussbaum identifies is that of bodily appetites and their pleasures.³⁰ Taken very generally, the opposition between the Greco-Roman and the Christian understanding of the correct way of relating to bodily appetites will provide a general sketch of how this could work.

Within Greco-Roman thought there is a focus on moderation and using *logos* to keep oneself from being affected by the sway of these bodily appetites, while still being able to enjoy them from time to time.³¹ In the Christian understanding, however, individuals should completely refrain from satisfying any and all bodily appetites, for individuals are incapable of moderation and will not be able to control themselves.³² The Greco-Roman perspective on this domain of human experience is shaped by their understanding of the individual as a rational animal that uses *logos* to master itself. The perspective of the Christian originates from an understanding of individuals as beings created by God, but who are inescapably sinful and influenced by the devil. It is quite uncontroversial to hold that humans can be moderate and control themselves so that they are not slaves of their appetites. At the same time, it is also quite evident that humans are susceptible to the pull of bodily pleasures, sometimes in such a way that it will govern their lives. For this reason, I would like to conclude that both understandings of our relation to bodily pleasures are attuned to a genuine aspect of human life. It is true that we are capable of moderation, but it is also true that we are capable of reaching a state in which we can no longer control ourselves. Both perspectives have a different focus, while being grounded in the necessary sphere of moral experiences.

When we combine what we have argued so far, we can conclude that there is no yardstick for determining *the* correct perspective. But, because both perspectives are attuned to a genuine aspect of the necessary human sphere of experience, the strong evaluations that follow are not subjective judgements. They are genuine ways of relating to the world. Moreover, the familiarity and attunement that make up our understanding are so pervasive that we hardly even notice our reliance on them. Since there is no principled way of determining their correctness on this level of inquiry, we should be ready to radically re-evaluate our evaluations. A perspective is always limited, so we should always be open to

²⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 246, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1988.tb00111.x>.

³⁰ Nussbaum, 246.

³¹ See for instance: Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. R. M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

³² Michel Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth', *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 198–227.

see the world in a different light.

Conclusion

In this essay I set out to discuss a metaethical position that goes beyond the traditional wondering about normative ethical claims and reaches a sense of wonder. I used a puzzling passage from Taylor's 'Responsibility for Self' as a starting point. In this chapter Taylor claims that there is no universal yardstick to determine the correctness of moral evaluations and that it follows that we have a responsibility to constantly re-evaluate our evaluations. The puzzle that we are left with is *how* he is able to defend that there is no yardstick and *why* such a responsibility would follow.

Dealing with this puzzle required a discussion of Taylor's rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice. I chose to take this route because Taylor's rejection rests on two unarticulated philosophical commitments from which the claim that there is no universal yardstick follows. The two central philosophical commitments that I discerned from his rejection of Sartre's theory of radical choice were: the primacy of being-in-the-world and its relation to (primordial) attunement. I explained the primacy of being-in-the-world by drawing on the distinction Heidegger makes between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. The first is a characterisation of the being of beings when they are used within an activity. According to Heidegger, these beings are dealt with on the basis of familiarity with the world and function within a referential totality that forms the basis of meaning within the world. Presence-at-hand is the being of beings that are merely objectively present. This usually happens when a being is no longer fit to function within an activity, or when we place ourselves outside the world. The point of this distinction is to show that our way of dealing with the world is strongly intertwined with the way it is meaningfully present. This can only be possible when we are always already in the open realm in which meaningful presence can be determined by being. It also illustrates how our primary way of being is within a meaningful world with which we are engaged and that derives its meaning from our activities. Relating to beings as objects is a secondary mode that is possible only because we are first and foremost in the world.

I identified attunement and Gibsonian affordances as the other implicit philosophical commitments in Taylor's rejection of Sartre, since strong evaluations are explications of the significance of the world. Beings can be drawn to act because, on the basis of their attunement with the world, they matter to other human beings, and because they are attuned to what they afford. It became clear that this is crucial for seeing why being-in-the-world is presupposed in any (moral) dilemma.

These two central philosophical commitments provide the basis for Taylor's claim that there is no universally correct yardstick. The key argument is that, because strong evaluations are drawn from meaning-revealing practices for dealing with the world, there is no way of determining their correctness on the basis of universally true principles. This is precisely the reason *why* Taylor calls upon us to radically re-evaluate our evaluations. It is a way of guarding the openness that makes us capable of going beyond what we have been given. This is what I identify as going beyond traditional wondering, towards a more original understanding of its possibility.

The final part of this paper dealt with the problem that arises when one combines the claim that there is no universally correct yardstick with the claim that first-order evaluations are not just arbitrary judgements. I tried to provide a possible path that can be followed to deal with this problem. I started

by showing how the perspectival character of attunement can be reconciled with being open to a shared world. A shared world that is rich enough for different perspectives to focus on different genuine aspects without contradicting each other. This was followed up by suggesting the usage of the structure of Nussbaum's argument in favour of non-relative virtues to show how we are all open to a shared realm of moral experiences. The shared sphere of experience functions like the shared world and makes it possible for different perspectives to reveal different genuine aspects of this sphere of experience. To make this more convincing I used a very general analysis of the differences between the Greco-Roman and the Christian understanding of man's ability to deal with bodily appetites. My analysis showed how seemingly contradicting strong evaluations could still get at genuine aspects of a shared moral sphere.

The question of whether it is possible to ground a multiplicity of perspectives on a shared moral sphere would also be interesting for further research. This asks for a more detailed account of how to deal with the problem of an 'anything goes' morality, which would be something that would jeopardise the whole thrust of Taylor's argument. To answer this question would require a more detailed account of the implications of a multiplicity of valid perspectives on the nature of truth in general. The challenge will be to show that this position is not an ordinary relativism, but, instead, an extraordinary realism.

Acknowledgements

I am truly thankful to the ESJP staff and the anonymous referees for taking the time to help me improve my essay. I greatly appreciate the extensive and detailed feedback that they gave me. While the overall structure of this essay has remained largely the same, the received feedback has helped me revise a substantial amount of what I had already written.

Luc Middelkoop (1995) obtained a bachelor's degree in Philosophy at Utrecht University after taking a long time to realise his calling. As he began to become ever more interested in Heidegger's thinking, he chose to attend Erasmus University in order to follow the 'Continental Philosophy and its History' track. After obtaining the master's degree, he started working through Heidegger's oeuvre to write a research proposal. This is sometimes halted by his activities as a cook, or as he plays (board) games with his family and friends.

References

- Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Charles Taylor. *Retrieving Realism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Fisher, Andrew. *Metaethics: An Introduction*. Durham: Acumen, 2011.
- Foucault, Michel. 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth'. *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 198–227.
- Gibson, James J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1986.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Translated by Johan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York, 1996.
- . *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- . *Sein und Zeit*. 11th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967.
- . *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. London & New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Miller, Alexander. *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction*. 2 edition. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2013.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 'Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September

1988): 32–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1988.tb00111.x>.

Papenfuss, Mary. 'Twitter Critics Explode Over Trump's Threatened "War Crimes" In Iran'. *HuffPost*, 38:33 500. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/twitter-donald-trump-war-crimes-threat_n_5e113f6fc5b6b5a713bb382d.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007.

Seneca. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Translated by R. M. Gummere. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Taylor, Charles. 'Responsibility for Self'. In *The Identities of Persons*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg. Topics in Philosophy ; 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.



Time Regained

Sander Tuns

“If you don’t understand the sequence of which a concept is part, you cannot understand the concept”,¹ Gilles Deleuze insisted in a seminar on Baruch Spinoza given at Vincennes in 1980. This approach to understanding thinkers and their concepts is already apparent in his 1966 book *Bergsonism*, which prompted the rediscovery of the work of Henri Bergson in French academia after a period of relatively decreased interest in his work. In this work, Deleuze interprets Bergson’s work as having three major stages—duration (*la durée*), memory and *élan vital*. Deleuze determines a progression between these, moving from an understanding of human psychology to an ontological understanding of reality.² The elucidated sequence provides a fuller understanding of the concepts than an analysis of a concept in isolation could achieve.

With the resurgence of interest in Bergson’s work in recent years, this ‘Deleuzian approach’ to philosophers and their concepts seemed appropriate for Arjen Kleinherenbrink to reconstruct the sequence of Bergson’s criticism of Immanuel Kant’s notion of time and how Bergson progressed this criticism with regard to the notion of free will.³ Kleinherenbrink positions himself in relation to the works of Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, who emphasize that Bergson’s ‘engagement with the legacy of Kant’s Copernican Revolution’ is scattered throughout his work;⁴ or suggest that Bergson’s philosophy is ‘a reversed Kantianism’⁵

The current essay will be working within the combined spirit of the aforementioned commentators and elucidate a sequence that goes beyond the sketched trajectory of Kleinherenbrink to shine a light on Bergson’s engagement with Kantian philosophy. The inevitable consequence of Kantian philosophy is the reformation of metaphysics and science as such. For Kant philosophy should be aware of reason and its capacities. He writes in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique* that ‘our reason has the peculiar fate that, with reference to one class of its knowledge, it is always troubled by questions which it cannot ignore because they are prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, and which it cannot answer because they transcend the powers of human reason.’⁶ This particular class of knowledge is metaphysical knowledge. The metaphysical questions reason cannot answer are prescribed by its own nature. What Bergson argues for in his work is that this prescription of reason upon itself might not have been completely understood by Kant. Bergson thinks Kant made a mistake at the beginning of his theorizing of the nature of reason that lead him to his conclusions on metaphysics and science.

This essay will follow Bergson along his conceptual developments starting from his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889; hereafter TFW), in which he develops his fundamental theory on time. This theory of time is not (yet) a theory of time “out there”, but from the outset a theory of experienced time. In other words, Bergson is interested in the nature of

¹ Deleuze, “Spinoza,” as cited in Kleinherenbrink, “Time, Duration and Freedom.” Translation of: ‘Et si vous ne comprenez pas la séquence dont un concept fait partie, vous ne pouvez pas comprendre le concept.’

² Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 13.

³ Kleinherenbrink, “Time, Duration and Freedom,” 203-205.

⁴ Ansell Pearson and Mullarkey, *Henri Bergson*, 32.

⁵ Mullarkey, *Bergson and philosophy*, 169.

⁶ Kant, *Critique*, Avii

consciousness, from which he can develop an epistemology and ultimately a conception of science and metaphysics as such. He develops this process further in the later works *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903) and *Creative Evolution* (1907). In these texts Bergson relates himself to the problems of Kantian philosophy in more detail and epistemologically matures the initial argument he makes in TFW. This essay follows this progression in Bergson's philosophy in order to fully understand the way Bergson relates himself to Kant and the alternative way of doing metaphysics and science he proposes.

Kantian time

"There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience."⁷ These famous words of Kant demand immediate clarification, since it does not follow from this that all knowledge also arises *from* experience. In other words, there are certain parts of cognition that do not originate in experience. In the introduction of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant poses the question of whether knowledge of this kind of cognition, absolutely separate from experience (pure a priori knowledge), is possible. Kant's aim is not to arrive at generalities that arise from experience, such as "every alteration has its cause", but at knowledge with nothing empirical mixed in with it, hence *pure* a priori.

Generalities, such as "every alteration has its cause", are what Kant calls *concepts*. These differ from *intuitions* in that concepts are general and mediate representations of objects, and intuitions are singular, immediate representations of objects.⁸ Intuitions happen when an object is given to us by means of a capacity Kant calls *sensibility*. An intuition is a conscious and objective representation of objects, properties or events, meaning that it refers to something specific. Sensibility supplies the intuitions, which then have an effect on us. This effect is called a *sensation*. For Kant a sensation is not an objective representation of an object but involves the subjective state this representation puts the subject in. It is through sensation that intuitions become empirical and thus subjective. Thus the difference between intuitions, sensations and concepts is as follows: intuitions regard immediate representations of e.g. an object, sensations regard the subjective state intuitions put subjects in and concepts regard generalities objects can share.

An *appearance* is the undetermined object of an empirical intuition.⁹ That is to say that appearance is a more general term for all the specific intuitions of objects, properties and events. Appearances have a matter and a form. The matter of an appearance is that which responds to sensation.¹⁰ The form of an appearance is that which gives order (in certain relations) to a manifold of appearances.¹¹ Kant seeks to understand the form of appearances. Such knowledge would be a priori, since what orders sensations cannot itself be a sensation. Instead, it must already be in one's mind, prior to experience. This means that the form is not dependent on the appearances that it orders but exists without an actual object of the senses as a *pure intuition*.

According to Kant, there are two pure forms of sensible intuition, namely space and time. In space, the objects outside of us are represented in their shape, size, and relation. This occurs by means of our

⁷ Ibid., B1.

⁸ Ibid., A19/B33.

⁹ Ibid., A20/B34.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

outer sense, a property of the mind.¹² Our inner sense determines the way in which the mind intuits itself. It does not and cannot do this by means of space but can only do this by means of time. Space and time are merely empty forms in which all phenomena are perceived. But then, if these forms differ from phenomena that are perceived, what exactly are these forms on their own? What is the nature of time? How does Kant define it?

In section two of the Transcendental Aesthetic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant speaks of time as ‘one and the same’ of which different times are parts of; successively, not simultaneously.¹³ There is one infinite time, which ‘determines the relation of representations in our inner sense.’¹⁴ We represent time as a homogenous line spreading out to infinity in which appearances succeed one after the other. Alteration is possible through the order that the pure intuition of time brings to the manifold of appearances. Also, magnitudes of time are only possible through ‘limitations on one single underlying time.’¹⁵ As Kant later on in the *Critique* mentions: ‘it is only the concept of quantities that admits [...] of *a priori* representation in intuition, while qualities cannot be represented in any but empirical intuition.’¹⁶

According to Bergson, Kant’s great mistake was to take time as homogenous.¹⁷ Allegedly, Kant thought that human consciousness is only capable of perceiving states of consciousness - or as Bergson calls it psychic states - by juxtaposition, side by side. Psychic states in this sense are succeeding each other on the line of time, in the same manner as distinct objects succeed each other on the lines of space. For Bergson, this is a confusion of time with space, because side by side differentiation happens in space and not in what Bergson calls duration, or real time. In TFW, Bergson provides two arguments against Kant’s concept of time. First, by making an argument from intensity and magnitude in which he discusses the intensity of psychic states. Secondly, he provides an argument from multiplicity and duration in which he discusses the multiplicity of conscious states and in which he develops the concept of duration.¹⁸

Intensity and magnitude

Bergson’s first argument sets out from a common way of expression. In daily life, we are used to talking about the intensity of psychic states in terms of growth and diminution. We might say a sensation is two times as intense as another sensation of the same kind. “I am twice as angry” or “I feel less ashamed” are common phrases. We talk about psychic states in the same way as we would talk about numbers. For example, when we say that four is greater than three. According to Bergson, this means that four contains three, in the sense that there are two unequal spaces in which the one is inside the other. Accordingly, three is inside four and thus four implies three. Quantity is based on the principle of the container and the contained. Now, the problem for Bergson here lies in attributing this principle of quantity to the intensity of psychic sensations. The idea of sensations as intensive magnitudes is a mistake because it does not express the true nature of sensations. Bergson argues against this common

¹² Ibid., A22/B37.

¹³ Ibid., A31/B47.

¹⁴ Ibid., A33/B50.

¹⁵ Ibid., A32/B48.

¹⁶ Ibid., A714/B742.

¹⁷ Bergson, *Time and free will*, 232.

¹⁸ The third part of TFW deals with the organization of conscious states and the issue of free will. This is outside of the trail this essay follows and will therefore not be directly discussed.

sense notion of intensive magnitudes by providing a series of examples.

Bergson distinguishes between two types of intensities: deep-seated psychic states and muscular efforts. In simple cases, deep seated psychic states are cases of pure intensity without any physical symptoms that accompany it. Yet, these pure, simple cases are rare, therefore Bergson provides examples that are as near as possible to help elucidate the nature of these pure and simple psychic states. One of the examples given is pity (or compassion), a moral feeling. At first, pity involves putting oneself mentally in the suffering position of another person. On its own this would lead to the avoidance of the other person since human beings prefer not to be in pain over being in pain, thus the feeling of the other's pain is soon accompanied by a new element; the need to help them get rid of the pain – i.e. sympathy. Lower forms of pity are 'perhaps a dread of some future evil to ourselves, (which) does hold a place in our compassion for other people's evil.'¹⁹ Because we fear a future evil, we want to prevent it from happening to ourselves and others. Yet, this is a mere low form of pity. True pity is to desire suffering. We would hardly want to see this desire realized, yet we form it despite ourselves. Pity involves a form of humility towards an alleged injustice that nature commits against us - it begs for 'self-abasement, an aspiration downwards.'²⁰ This downwards aspiration is nevertheless uplifting. Because we manage to dissociate our thought from certain sensuous goods, we feel superior to them. Pity ultimately involves humility with a charming side-effect of superiority. The supposed increasing intensity of pity involves a sequence that develops 'from repugnance to fear, from fear to sympathy, and from sympathy itself to humility.'²¹

Using this example, Bergson shows that a moral emotion such as pity does not simply denote a development of increasing intensity, as the common way of speaking suggests. To feel less or more pity for someone does not involve one sensation that decreases or increases in intensity but consists of qualitative transformations. This process does not obey the principle of the container and the contained because repugnance is not inside fear and neither does fear include repugnance. What does happen is a permeating succession of different phases of pity that qualitatively differ from each other. Qualitative transformations are a temporal heterogeneity and cannot be satisfactorily represented by any symbol and therefore also not by one of lesser or more. To understand them as intensive magnitudes is a translation of the intensive into the extensive. This is to understand psychic states as spatial.

But what about manifestations of consciousness in which the intensity spreads to extensity? As is the case, for example, with psychic states that involve muscular efforts. To illustrate such a manifestation, Bergson invites us to participate in an exercise.²² To partake, so to say, in "embodied armchair philosophy". Let us press our lips together. Press them more and more tightly. Without further examination, this would feel as if we are experiencing one and the same sensation continually increasing in strength. Yet when we engage in closer reflection, it will be noticed that more and more muscles of the face, then of the head, and then of the entire body will get involved. While our attention is focused on a supposed increase of the quantity of a singular sensation, in truth, there is an increase of qualitatively distinct sensations. From these two examples, it is evident that near both extremes in deep-seated psychic feelings and muscular efforts, and consequently in their intermediate states, there is a

¹⁹ Bergson, *Time and free will*, 19. Word between brackets added.

²⁰ Bergson, *Time and free will*, 19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 25.

qualitative process and an increasing complexity which do not allow to be merely understood as intensive magnitudes.

While Kant held all states of consciousness to be in the same medium, Bergson, contra Kant, gives us an account of consciousness that is only accustomed to being thought of in terms of space. It does so because the sensations we perceive have an external cause, an external object. These causes are extensive and measurable and thus consciousness associates the 'idea of a certain quantity of cause with a certain quality of effect.'²³ The idea is transferred into the sensation; 'the quantity of the cause into the quality of the effect.'²⁴ The every-day use of language demands this fallacy since it facilitates life with ease. Yet this does not mean that magnitudes are reflective of the true nature of sensation or inner life. When sensations are increasing in intensity they progress in qualitatively different psychic states, not in magnitude. This puts intensities in the middle of two streams: 'one of which brings us the idea of extensive magnitude from without, while the other brings us from within [...] the image of an inner multiplicity.'²⁵ With this expression, Bergson's concludes his first argument from intensity and magnitude in TFW. The second argument Bergson provides against Kant's conception of time concerns these inner multiplicities: how are they the same and/or different from extensive magnitudes?

Multiplicity and Duration

Bergson's second argument starts with a question: what is a number? It can be defined as a collection of units that are, or are assumed to be, identical to one another. For example, when we count a flock of fifty sheep, we know they are not all exactly the same, but we neglect their individual differences and only focus on that which they have in common. At the very least, there is one thing in which they differ: their position in space. When we do not regard the actual sheep, and only count them, we must place them side by side in an ideal space in order to count them. One might argue that it is possible to count them by merely repeating one image fifty times, which would mean that the series lies in duration instead of space. However, according to Bergson, this cannot be done, because it would not allow the number to increase. In pure duration only a single sheep can exist at once. To be able to count the sheep it is necessary to think them all together at once. This can only be done in space. It takes an ideal space which we can imagine the sheep in, to be able to count them. Thus, the idea of numbers requires necessarily the idea of space.

This becomes clear when we look at how children are taught numbers. At first, they imagine or are presented objects to be counted. For example, the food eaten by Eric Carle's "very hungry caterpillar" in the book of the same name. The caterpillar eats one apple on Monday, two pears on Tuesday, etc. The child sees the fruit on the page, or if they are younger are shown three-dimensional objects, to make them understand. At a later stage of the child's educational path, these fruits become points and finally, they are fully stripped of the image and the children are left with mere symbols of abstract numbers. The symbol is the conventional way of expressing a number, while its spatial origin is forgotten. When we try to clearly visualize the abstract number itself, and not just the symbol, we

²³ Ibid., 42.

²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁵ Ibid., 73.

recourse to an extended image, as discussed in the previous paragraph. The intuition of space does not always evidently accompany every idea of number, but every idea of a number implies the intuition of space.

This brings us to the formulation of one of two different kinds of multiplicities: the multiplicity of material objects counted in space.²⁶ To be able to count objects in space no symbolic representation is necessary; it suffices to think them in the medium they are observed in. This is the multiplicity ‘of exteriority, of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of order, of quantitative differentiation, of *difference in degree*; it is a numerical multiplicity, *discontinuous and actual*.²⁷ What matters for Bergson here is that we refer to these multiplicities in possibilities of seeing and/or touching them. Something which is impossible for the second kind of multiplicity, the one of conscious states.

The second, *continuous* multiplicity appears in pure duration. This is an ‘internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind*; it is a *virtual and continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers.’²⁸ To express psychic states numerically means to separate them and artificially place intervals between them. In order to count the rings of a church bell, one must place the sensations of the sounds distinctly next to each other in an ideal space. This means that one deviates from the continuity of the bells in order to juxtapose them in a homogenous medium by means of symbolic representation. One might protest that the bell itself rings a certain number of times and that we pick up on that. Yet, we can only do this by means of a translation into spatial terms. If we would experience the bells in a pure duration, the mind could not make sense of it, because there is only one ring at a time. The act of putting the sounds in an ideal space allows the mind to think the bells together at once and consequently enables it to count them. But the pure psychic states themselves do not admit to amounts, the true nature of consciousness is lost in counting or even naming sensations.

According to Bergson, the true nature of consciousness exists only in duration. The continuous multiplicity of conscious states, like we have seen in pity, is only after its passing *artificially* understood in terms of time as a fourth axis of space. Which is, as discussed above, also a spatial understanding of time. Pure duration precedes this understanding. Bergson states that ‘pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.’²⁹ Duration is the realm of subjectivity and is always changing, always becoming. Because words are in a sense like numbers, to talk about duration is always a violation of immediate experience. Words are separate units that can never express the true becoming that is duration, but merely represent it. Language is limited. Bergson provides multiple images to communicate duration, but mentions that ‘if a man is incapable of getting for himself the intuition of the constitutive duration of his own being, nothing will ever give it to him, concepts no more than images.’³⁰ Images and concepts cannot recreate the flow of one’s consciousness or even the feeling of it. To “experience” duration requires an effort. Philosophy, according to Bergson, should promote this

²⁶ Bergson, *Time and free will*, 85.

²⁷ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 38. Deleuze derives the two kinds of multiplicity from the works of G. B. R. Riemann. Deleuze suggests that Bergson has been well aware of Riemann works, despite him not being mentioned in TFW. Deleuze refers to this multiplicity as discrete. Discrete because it contains the principle of its own metric, i.e. one of its parts is what is multiple. Fifty sheep is a discrete multiplicity, because one sheep is repeated fifty times (in space).

²⁸ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 38.

²⁹ Bergson, *Time and free will*, 100.

³⁰ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 15-16.

effort, which goes against the habits of the mind but can never be fully articulated.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson compares duration to three images: two spools with tape between them, the colour spectrum and an infinite elastic band.³¹ One spool is unwinding the tape and the other winds it up. We can compare this to duration: when our lives endure, our past grows and our future decreases in the continual manner of the tape. Every moment is different because there is some of the tape added to the past. Another resemblance between this image and duration is that the tape is continual without juxtaposition. However, the downside of this image is that it evokes the idea of a linear duration with parts that are homogenous and superimposable on each other. The tape does not change in nature. Therefore, Bergson needs another image. The image of the colour spectrum presents duration as a qualitative multiplicity. To move over the shades and colours of the spectrum is to experience gradual qualitative change. The drawback of this image is that it does not present a continuity since the colours are spatially juxtaposed. Duration excludes juxtaposition and extension. The third image of an infinite elastic band is supposedly fixed in a mathematical point, the present. Bergson first asks us to imagine this band being drawn out progressively, to make it longer. Bergson then tells us to fix our attention on the movement itself, rather than the line it constitutes. Focusing on the movement of the elastic band allows us to see the movement of duration. This movement is continuous, heterogeneous and indivisible. Note that even though we can divide a spatial line that represents the movement, for the movement itself this is not possible. The moving object is a mere abstraction from the movement. This third image expresses the pure mobility of duration but remains incomplete because every image is incomplete. Every image can only resemble in certain aspects the unity of an advancing movement and in others the multiplicity of expanding states. Every image must sacrifice certain aspects over others.

Duration is all that these images tell us at once: 'variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction.'³² It is the synthesis of multiplicity and unity. The two arguments that Bergson develops in TFW counter Kant's conception of time as an empty, homogenous form serving as a fourth axis of space. Bergson argues that Kant's time is *artificial*. To think of time spatially is to abnegate true time and it is only done out of habit and for the benefit of the practical. According to Bergson, Kant wrongly thought that intuitions are singular, immediate representations of objects. The singularity of intuitions stems from the contamination of time with space. Therefore, Kant wrongly thought of consciousness as a unity across time. Since he thinks time as a homogeneous background for the manifold of all experience, Kant conceives of time as the ever-changing manifold *itself*. He concludes that consciousness is a unity because the underlying empty forms keep it all together.³³ Bergson breaks with this unity. He shows there is a realm of consciousness that Kant neglected. Bergsonian intuition is the simple, indivisible experience of consciousness by which it grasps duration, not an immediate representation of the object as is intuition for Kant. The discovery of duration serves as the starting point for the construction of a Bergsonian epistemology. Bergson's correction of Kantian time allows him to develop his method of intuition, by means of which his relation to Kantianism progresses to its most vital point. But before we get to this vital point it is important to briefly sketch why a new epistemology is necessary. What are the problems Bergson is trying to solve? And how does Bergson

³¹ Ibid, 11-15.

³² Ibid., 15.

³³ Kant, *Critique*, A352.

solve these?

Time out of joint

In the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes that ‘the battlefield of [...] endless controversies is called metaphysics.’³⁴ On this battlefield reason is confronted with its dark side. Despotist dogmatists and sceptic rebels fight it out in an ongoing battle for knowledge of the most general order. The so-called queen of all sciences is forever incomplete because she puts forward principles that exceed the limits of experience and therefore cannot adhere to empirical testing. The analytic claims of rationalists and the synthetic claims of empiricists are both insufficient to answer the metaphysical questions they are engaged in. Both sides of the battlefield are diffuse according to Kant. His critical philosophy attempts to bring an end to this war and install perpetual peace in philosophy. Acknowledging the principles of metaphysics as the presuppositions of experience in general is needed in order to do so. Time and space are empty forms that make experience possible, and categories such as causality facilitate our understanding. Kant’s solution solves the disputes of empiricists and rationalists by placing their discussion in the realm of science. Science - limited by the forms of sensation and categories of the understanding - produces relative knowledge and consequently metaphysics is reduced to mere speculation.

Bergson wants to save science from its relativity and metaphysics from its supposed meaningless speculation by recovering intuition. He agrees with Kant that the field of metaphysics is somewhat like a battlefield but does not invoke the Kantian war rhetoric. Bergson speaks about ‘antagonistic schools’ whose members have chosen a side and an opponent to play a never-ending game with.³⁵ Philosophers through the ages might have had their differences, but Bergson urges that after comparing their definitions and concepts one must conclude that there is one notion they share.³⁶ They all distinguish between two ways of knowing a thing. The first one is from the outside, relative to our point of view and to the symbols we use. The second one is from the inside, not relative in any way but absolute. Kant thought the second way of knowing was impossible. Things-in-themselves are unknowable due to the transcendental apparatus. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson gives the example of a character in a novel in order to explain the division between two types of knowing. The author may describe them in many ways, from a multitude of perspectives, but this can never be equal to the immediate experience of being the character. The literary adage of “show, don’t tell” aims to fill this gap, but will only achieve this if it evokes a qualitative experience of identification with the character. A description of a city never fully makes sense if the reader has never been in that city. Even photographs taken from every possible point of view of the city would not be equal to the real experience of walking in its streets.

The point Bergson makes here is that from the outside perspective one must translate experience into an explanation and pile up these explanations in order to reach what one wants to express, but still one will never reach it. *Analysis* reduces the object to already known elements that the object has in common with other objects. The object is grasped by that which it is not or, in other words, by symbols and representation. According to Bergson, the positive sciences work this way. Even the ones concerned

³⁴ Ibid., Aviii.

³⁵ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 21, 67.

³⁶ Ibid., 1.

with life - biology and medicine – are confined to the visual symbols of life: organs, anatomical elements, etc. By means of symbolic representations the positive sciences try to recreate the real. But they can never fully do that, because that what you write down, i.e. partial notations, never can be the same as the real parts. Bergson gives an example where notations are completely symbolic. Suppose you are given the letters of an unknown poem in a random order and you are asked to reconstruct the poem. This would be impossible. If the letters were all parts of the poem you could try different orders until it fits, as children do with a Chinese puzzle. But the letters are mere notations. So, you can only reconstruct the poem if you already know the poem. Because if you do not already know the poem, you could only get the gist of it by giving yourself an intuition and from this re-descend to the symbols. This intuition gives you a sense of an experience of the whole poem, perhaps from another poem you've experienced. From this you would attempt to constitute a meaningful whole. If the letters, these symbols, would be real parts of the poem, this artificial intuition would be unnecessary. So, we are not dealing with fragments of the thing, but with fragments of its symbol.

For Bergson the mistake between the symbolic and the real also occurs in metaphysics; both the antagonistic schools of empiricism and of rationalism mistake partial notations for real parts.³⁷ Let us consider either school's approaches to the self. Empiricists work like psychologists who look for the "ego" in psychical states. From the real parts of psychic life, they try to construct a coherent whole, by referring to them using the term ego and by denoting psychical states as "states of the ego". All they do is make notations of psychical states and place readymade concepts on them. Empiricists seek the original in the translation and the real in concepts. They make the error of believing that they can find the objects, in this case the self, while remaining on the level of analysis. They take the outer perspective on inner life. Rationalism makes the same mistake by persisting on the unity of the self as a form without content in which mental states happen. Bergson does not find empiricism nor rationalism effective in understanding the real because

the former, seeking the unity of the ego in the gaps, [...] is led to fill the gaps with other states, and so on indefinitely, so that the ego [...] tends towards zero, as analysis is pushed farther and farther; whilst rationalism, making the ego the place where mental states are lodged, is confronted with an empty space [...] which goes beyond each of the successive boundaries that we try to assign to it [...] and which tends to lose itself no longer in zero, but in the infinite.³⁸

Bergson and Kant both criticize the metaphysics of early modernity, but for different reasons. They would agree that the field is unnecessarily divided and that this division problematizes its very aim of gathering knowledge of the most general kind, but they disagree about the cause of and solution for these problems. Kant considers metaphysics to be impossible. He considers metaphysical thought only to be possible through a superior, original intuition, an *intellectual intuition*. Such an intuition can only belong to a 'primordial being', not to humans.³⁹ The human intuition is dependent on the existence of an object. Only if an object triggers our capacity for representation intuitions happen. Human intuition

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

³⁸ Ibid., 35-36.

³⁹ Kant, *Critique*, B72.

(or perhaps intuition of all finite beings) is always derivative (*intuitus derivativus*) in this sense, not original (*intuitus originarius*). An original intuition can be attained if ‘only by thinking an object the object exists and the object contained nothing not contained in the concept of it.’⁴⁰ This is a divine capacity. Metaphysics⁴¹ for Kant would be only possible through a vision, not through logic.

Logic leads to the four antinomies of pure reason. Kant showed that there are four antinomies through which a thesis and the negation of this thesis, the antithesis, can be defended with equal valid proof. Reason results in contradictory and equally true (or wrong) statements. Consider for example the first antinomy, which fits the theme of this essay. The thesis ‘the world has, as to time and space, a beginning’ and the antithesis ‘the world is, as to time and space, infinite’ both are statements about reality in itself, but contradict each other.⁴² This antinomy here is of the mathematical type because – as Kant himself puts it – ‘they concern adding together or dividing up the homogenous’.⁴³ The theses concern the magnitude of reality but we cannot make sense of them due to our limited experience. It is impossible for humans to experience both finite and infinite time and space. Finitude of space and time is impossible to experience because we would understand them to be bounded by an empty space or an empty time. These are mere ideas, constituted by negation. The magnitude of the world must lie in itself. But this is in contradiction with the concept of a sensible world, whose existence only takes place in representation, in experience. The theses are in contradiction with each other because they deal with something outside of experience in experiential terms.

The transcendental subject is stuck in the finitude of sensibility. When it attempts to extrapolate from sensibility, it falls into the trap of the antinomies. This is the main reason why Kant urged a critical philosophy. Human knowledge is limited, and we ought to be aware of that. The answer to the question “What can we know?” is empirical and constrained by the transcendental forms of intuition and categories of our understanding. Science should operate within and only within these limits. Every attempt at knowledge outside of this is consequently speculative. Kant drags metaphysical concepts (such as causality, possibility, negation and plurality) into the transcendental, as conditions for experience. The only way out of this, an intellectual intuition, he regarded to be impossible, because he pictured it as a vision of reality in itself, radically different from experience. This vision would have to break with sensation. The subject would have to break with itself to achieve such a vision. Bergson thought Kant was wrong in this sense. As is shown in the first chapter of this essay, there is a realm of experience not dependent on analytic concepts: duration. Bergson thinks knowledge can come from this realm and the intuition that can grasp it.

Intuition as method

The method of intuition is not a method in the conventional sense. There is no finite number of steps that need to be repeated to study a subject. The method of intuition concerns intuition as a movement into the concrete flow of duration. We must *try* to follow duration. Bergson does not pose a grand epistemology that at once can understand reality, but a rather modest attempt that starts from

⁴⁰ Dryer, *Kant's Solution for Verification*, 202.

⁴¹ Here not meaning the futile, endless disputing of empiricists and rationalists, but the kind of knowledge of reality in itself.

⁴² Kant, *Prolegomena*, 91.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 93.

duration.⁴⁴ Bergson draws an analogy between our consciousness and an imagined orange consciousness. This strange, orange consciousness would not experience itself from the outside as orange, instead it would experience itself being in a continuum between yellow and red. It might even suspect a whole other spectrum of colours beyond yellow and red. In this same manner we must, as a single consciousness, suspect a whole spectrum of durations and trace our relations to those. Just as orange is a real part of the colour spectrum, so is consciousness a real part of duration. The boundaries of real parts are not as clear cut as notational parts of concepts are. Intuition as a method must therefore sympathize with its own duration and attempt to *follow* its continuity and mobility. Through itself it must bring itself into contact with the whole and follow its own movement into other areas.

Intuition can follow its duration in two directions: downwards and upwards. The downward movement proceeds towards matter and its pure repetition. Matter repeats because it divides our simple sensations and dilutes its quality into quantity. At the limit of matter is pure homogeneity. The upward movement advances towards ‘a duration which *strains*, contracts, and intensifies itself more and more.’⁴⁵ At the limit of this movement would be eternity. Note that Bergson does not imply that intuition searches for eternity, as Schopenhauer and Schelling have done.⁴⁶ For them, intuition was an immediate search for the eternal. Eternity would be grasped at once, as one being from which all of existence could be deduced. This would be a conceptual eternity of death. Bergson’s intuition attempts to find the true duration, an eternity of life. Bergson aims at the absolute – a living, moving eternity that includes all duration and the materiality it is dispersed in. The downward movement towards the world of physics and the upwards movement towards the eternity of all durations are the extreme limits between which intuition moves. This movement is the essence of metaphysics. That Bergson’s thought is “frankly dualistic” becomes apparent here. On the one hand, there is the material side of reality: an external, homogeneous, quantitative, numerical multiplicity of similarity, juxtaposition and differences in degree. On the other hand, there is the duration of reality: an internal, heterogeneous, qualitative, continuous multiplicity of succession and differences in kind. It is a movement of the mind that can orient us towards either.

The movements of the mind are habitual and not necessary by nature. As we have seen in the examples of pity and pressing our lips together, it is possible to become attentive to the qualitative continuity of experience by making an effort. The dominant habit of the mind is to seek solid support, to keep us grounded. It does so by representing life as things and states. Our intellect provides us with sensations and ideas, or ‘solid perceptions’ and ‘stable conceptions.’⁴⁷ It replaces the mobility of the real with immobility. As a net that catches fish out of a flowing river, the intellect catches ready-made concepts out of the flowing of duration, and then calls the conceptual fish knowledge of the river. It is, of course, knowledge of the river in a way, but it is interested knowledge. The (schematic) net catches that which can be utilized. Concepts and sensations ask reality a practical question and reality replies ‘as must be done in business by a Yes or a No.’⁴⁸ Doing so lets the movement of the water escape through the net. What metaphysicians need to do is grasp this movement and obtain disinterested knowledge of the real - i.e. knowledge that is not guided by needs.

⁴⁴ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁶ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 32-3.

⁴⁷ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 66.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Philosophizing is the reversal of the habitual direction of the mind. The mind can place itself in mobile reality by means of intuition, an *intellectual sympathy*. Intuition is a simple act, but difficult to exercise. To be able to exercise it, the subject has to do violence upon itself. It has to perpetually adjust itself and revise its categories and concepts. By no means does this imply sloppiness. As Deleuze points out, Bergson's intuition is not just a feeling, inspiration or sympathy, but a fully developed method, aimed at philosophical precision.⁴⁹ Strict rules and accompanying tasks follow. The first task is to apply the test to the truthfulness or falsity of problems.⁵⁰ It is wrong to think that only solutions can be true or false. Problems can be false too and we must do away with them. Problems can be false in two ways; as non-existing problems or as badly stated problems. Non-existing problems contain a confusion of the "more" and the "less". The mistake being made is apparent in the example of being and non-being. There is actually "more" in non-being than in being, because in non-being there is the idea of being *and* the logical operation of negation *and* the psychological motivation to exercise this negation.⁵¹ When we ask about the origin of the universe, we fall into this error. We act as if non-being could have existed before being.⁵² As if being preceded itself as a part of nothing. Negation is at the source of non-existing problems and inhibits our awareness of other kinds of being – not homogenous, but fundamentally heterogeneous. Badly stated problems are false problems because their terms represent badly analysed composites. This is the result of arbitrarily grouping together things that differ in kind. Take, for example, the question of whether happiness is reducible to pleasure.⁵³ Both happiness and pleasure consist of irreducible multiplicities of conscious states, which are impossible to reduce to each other. In badly analysed composites the natural articulation does not correspond with the articulation of the problem. We can see that the former false problem rests on the latter because a confusion of the more and the less is the result of a general idea of quantity instead of quality. Thereby we see only differences in degree instead of differences in kind.

The second step in the method of intuition is therefore to rediscover differences in kind. Bergson does so by division. Composites must be divided according to their natural articulation into differences in kind. Such divisions are found all over Bergson's work: duration and space, heterogeneity and homogeneity, quality and quantity, internal and external, matter and memory, etc. However, in reality, these dualisms are always mixed up. The examples of pity and the pressing of the lips are supposed to resemble as much as possible the extremes of these dualisms, but they are nevertheless not *pure*. The pressing of the lips involves an effort of consciousness and pity involves bodily feelings. The task of the philosopher is to elucidate the tendencies of composites towards the two extremes of the dualism by means of qualitative differentiation. Bergson cites Plato's example of the cook who 'carves the animal without breaking its bones, by following the articulations marked out by nature.'⁵⁴ But this dissection, this division, only lasts for a moment. Duration needs to be re-formed into a monism again, otherwise one is left with mere analytical concepts. The extremes must be integrated again. The lines of

⁴⁹ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 13.

⁵⁰ The tasks or acts that must be executed are based on the rules that Deleuze distinguishes in the first chapter of *Bergsonism*.

⁵¹ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 17. On the psychological motivation: 'such as when a being does not correspond to our expectation and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us.'

⁵² Deleuze on Bergson's relation to Hegel with regard to negation: 'The singular will never be attained by correcting a generality with another generality. In all this, Bergson clearly has in mind Hamelin whose *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation* dates from 1907. Bergsonism's incompatibility with Hegelianism, indeed with any dialectical method, is also evident in these passages. Bergson criticizes the dialectic for being a false movement, that is, a movement of the abstract concept, which goes from one opposite to the other only by means of imprecision' [Deleuze, "Spinoza," 44].

⁵³ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 18.

⁵⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 172.

duration and space intersect in the real and therefore must intersect in our knowledge of it.

The third step that one must take to practice metaphysics is to: ‘state problems and solve them in terms of time rather than of space.’⁵⁵ Take the primary Bergsonian dualism of duration and space, which all other dualisms ‘involve [...], derive from [...] or result in.’⁵⁶ It is always in duration that differences in kind are located. When we study a sugar cube, we cannot do this to satisfaction if we only look at it from the outside at its spatial dimensions. This way, we will only grasp the differences in degree it has from other objects that are located elsewhere. The cube’s duration is where its differences in kind are. It has a way of being in duration, which we can sympathize with from our own duration. We cannot study its qualitative succession from the outside. No, we ‘must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts.’⁵⁷ The wait is here of great significance because this is how the sugar’s duration coincides with my impatience, with my own duration. It changes me. ‘It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*.’⁵⁸

The method of intuition involves a simple act by which one places oneself into duration. From this concrete reality one indefinitely carves, like Plato’s cook, the lines of that reality, in order to think them into their mobility. The second and third step make intuition into a method, into more than a feeling, inspiration or sympathy. This method aims at nothing other than precision in philosophy. Even though it starts as a simple act of intuition, the method cannot be contained into this single act. By seeing the colour grey in a simple act, one can sympathize with it and understand how it can be differentiated from white and black. But the method does not stop there. All the other composites in which black and white exist - e.g. in different tones, shades, and tints - can be approached with these tendencies of white and black. When we recognize tendencies in other composites we must accumulate and fuse these insights together into new traces of knowledge. The method of intuition is therefore supposed to invent new concepts that can approximate reality. It can only approximate because the mobile can never be fully expressed by immobile concepts. This does not undo the importance of Bergson’s method, because what is won by him is that the starting point – which is as soon as possible forgotten by analysis for the sake of the symbol – is the mobile. Bergson tries to be loyal to this starting point. The precision of the method is in its diversity of acts that ‘corresponds to all the degrees of beings.’⁵⁹ Due to the differentiation and integration of infinitesimal calculus done qualitatively, Bergson can intuit mobility and approach it step-by-step. Bergson understands that reality is ever-changing and that in order to learn about it, one must ever change with it. This means that science must always adjust itself at the core of its pursuit, i.e. to perpetually restate the formulations of its problems.

Restating the problems

According to Bergson, the *Critique of Pure Reason* starts with a badly analysed composite. Because of his notion of time, Kant presents the intellect ‘bathed in an atmosphere of spatiality’.⁶⁰ It is only through this atmosphere that sensations come to us. Sensations are only judged in their spatial form by the

⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 57.

⁶⁰ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 223.

Understanding (*Verstand*) and therefore reason can only infer about space and time as spatial entities. The whole of the intellect is defined by its spatial origin. The antinomies of pure reason, Kant's most vital problems, are consequently also defined by this original mistake. Kant's philosophy lives and dies by the antinomies, Bergson says.⁶¹ The intellect cannot think beyond the contradictions that it produces and therefore a critical philosophy is necessary. But the foundation of Kant's transcendental architecture is unstable. The antinomies only restrain the mind because we think in spatial terms. When we think in terms of duration the antinomies dissolve. The antinomies are false problems caused by badly analysed composites of time and space. The conditions upon which the antinomies rest are not necessary conditions for experience and can, therefore, be avoided by stepping into duration instead of analysis.⁶² The antinomies are simply not an issue anymore from the point of view of duration.

Philosophy is not a matter of choosing sides between possible answers to a false problem. Via intuition Bergson places himself above the disputes of metaphysical schools. He says that 'either metaphysics is only this play of ideas, or else, if it is a serious occupation of the mind, if it is a science and not simply an exercise, it must transcend concepts in order to reach intuition.'⁶³ Bergson's goal is to have metaphysics dispense with symbols and free it from the speculative accusation Kant made towards it. This does not mean that he wants to do away with concepts and science as such. Scientific research gives us insight into the material operations of reality, but it needs to become more metaphysical, just as metaphysics needs to become more scientific in its aim.⁶⁴ This would restore the continuity between the sciences and the intuitions from which it has obtained its revolutions. Science must stay in connection with metaphysics to stay closer to its origin. But metaphysics must also stay in connection with the sciences in order to be progressive and indefinitely perfectible. Because of its invention of concepts, metaphysics will grow in range and extension, blurring the lines between the sciences and intuition. For science, this means that it can advance towards all sources, directions and tendencies that life is full of.

Bergson calls his method of intuition the 'true empiricism' that searches for the originals of life.⁶⁵ It does not seek originals in the translations of the intellect as mundane empiricism does but in immediate consciousness. The continuous multiplicity in which immediate consciousness exists will always be limited when grasped through the intellect. In opposition to this limitation, Bergson's philosophy can be seen as a reversed Ockham's razor.⁶⁶ It is an attempt to do away with simplicity. Reality is not simple. There is always more than is necessary in nature. To reconstruct reality as simply being there for the satisfaction of the intellect is cheating oneself, like audiences of the theatre who think in real life people always speak neatly, one after the other. It is an artificial construction taken to be real. Bergson argues against this by stating that

⁶¹ Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the adventure*, 114. Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 86.

⁶² There is a more specific way in which Bergson dissolves the antinomies, especially the mathematical antinomies. On this subject he says the following: 'at bottom, it is for not having distinguished degrees in spatiality that he has had to take space readymade as given - whence the question how the "sensuous manifold" is adapted to it. It is for the same reason that he has supposed matter wholly developed into parts absolutely external to one another; - whence antinomies, of which we may plainly see that the thesis and antithesis suppose the perfect coincidence of matter with geometrical space, but which vanish the moment we cease to extend to matter what is true only of pure space' [Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 224-5]. To fully understand and explain this quote further research into Bergson's conception of space and matter is necessary and is therefore out of the scope of the current essay.

⁶³ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁶ Mullarkey, *Bergson and philosophy*, 234.

if science is wholly and entirely a work of analysis or of conceptual representation, if experience is only to serve therein as a verification of “clear ideas,” if, instead of starting from multiple and diverse intuition – which insert themselves in the particular movement of each reality, but do not always dovetail into each other,- it professes to be a vast mathematic, a single and closed-in system of relations, imprisoning the whole of reality in a network prepared in advance,- it becomes a knowledge purely relative to human understanding.⁶⁷

This is exactly what the *Critique of Pure Reason* does. Kant’s project laid the foundation for a universal mathematics, establishing what the intellect and its object must be so that an ‘uninterrupted mathematic may bind them together.’⁶⁸ Even stronger, the intellect cannot do anything else than establish this universal mathematics. The *Critique* is a revived Platonism that captures all things in its universal relations and *only* in its relations. How the things in themselves are is problematized by Kant. Things-in-themselves are unknowable. But how can he even affirm their problematic status? By stating the problem, Kant already admits to their existence, namely as something that cannot be known. The path to knowing them, an intellectual intuition, Kant ‘intimated but blocked.’⁶⁹ The roadblock on this path to knowledge dissolves from the viewpoint of duration and consequently de-problematizes the thing-in-itself.

Generally speaking, a theory of knowledge can be based on three object-subject relations: either the subject is determined by objects, the objects are determined by the subject or there is some mysterious Leibnizian *harmonie préétablie* between subject and object. Bergson adds a fourth possibility to this list: a relation consisting of a mutual progressive adaptation between object and subject.⁷⁰ If the intellect is a special function of the mind turned towards matter and not the all-defining universal view of reality, then the intellect and matter have adapted their form towards each other in the course of evolution. This is a natural development, ‘because it is the same inversion of the same movement which creates at once the intellectuality of the mind and the materiality of things.’⁷¹ It is a case of co-creation of object and subject, engendering their forms through evolution.

Kant never thought this double relationship was possible because he did not think that the mind overflowed the intellect and because he put time on the same plane as space and therefore did not attribute to duration an absolute existence.⁷² Bergson, who does both things, can consequently approach epistemological issues differently. Not relatively, but approximately. A critique of knowledge must be accompanied by a philosophy of life in order to transcend the human condition. Instead of maintaining a split between phenomenon and noumenon, Bergson can approach epistemological problems ‘in terms of the relation between our partial perspective of the real, which has evolved in accordance with the vital needs of adaptation, and a mobile whole.’⁷³ Metaphysics and the sciences can and must re-establish contact with continuity and mobility through intuition. This begs for a reformulation of its problems. Bergson’s metaphysics concerns the invention of problems, of which the shape does not yet exist clearly. It is about creating the terms in which the problem can be stated, and therefore stating and

⁶⁷ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 83.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹ Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the adventure*, 124.

⁷⁰ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 225.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 225-6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷³ Ansell-Pearson, *Thinking Beyond the Human Condition*, 14.

solving problems are almost equal.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The discovery of duration, as a realm of consciousness overlooked by Kant, allowed Bergson to escape the inescapability of the problems of Kantianism, namely the antinomies of pure reason, the demanding spatiality of the understanding and the problematic status of things-in-themselves. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson translates this seemingly untranslatable realm into a serious alternative for Kantian epistemology. This essay has shown that the relation Bergson has with Kantianism is one of intricate engagement that is ultimately aimed at breaking away from Kant's problematic conclusions. Yet, at the same time, Bergson is loyal towards Kant's legacy. Bergson does not seem to overthrow Kantian analysis as such but rather wants to reframe it in a grander play. He breaks the subject open and does not seek to destroy it. The consequences of Kantian philosophy are not as ultimate as Kant thought they were since there are different ways of relating ourselves to the world. Knowledge is not limited to what it already knows but can be creative in conceptions. With the discovery of duration and the cultivation of the intuition that grasps it, human consciousness can find its way out of the scrupulous demands of analysis and towards the mobility, continuity, creation and evolution of life. What Bergson has gained is a creative playfulness of knowledge. Science does not have to wait for a *paradigm shift* to look for new ways of conceptualizing its subjects if it incorporates this creative movement in its methodology. The three steps that consist of identifying wrong problems, rediscovering differences in kind, and stating problems in terms of time rather than space are useful tools in forcing this creative moment in scientific and metaphysical inquiry into existence. What Bergson offers is an epistemology aimed at grasping the changing nature of consciousness, life and ultimately reality as such.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sjoerd van Tuinen for his guidance, feedback and excellent conversations when I got stuck. They always helped me back on track again. I would also like to thank Henri Krop, Eddie Adelmund, Friso van Luyk, Sietse Leeflang, Mark Tieleman, Patrick Delaere and Clement Bezemer for their feedback during the writing process. I would also like to thank Sven Hogervorst and Ties van Gemert for their compassion and understanding during the editing process. Not to forget their editors, who also gave helpful feedback. And in particular I would like to thank Nicole Chmielinski for her overall support during the creation of this text. Thanks for putting up with me. I wish you well.

Sander Tuns (1992) obtained a BA in philosophy at the Erasmus School of Philosophy in Rotterdam. He is currently attending a Masters in Philosophy of KU Leuven in Belgium.

⁷⁴ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 58.

References

- Ansell-Pearson, Keith. *Philosophy and the adventure of the virtual – Bergson and the time of life*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Ansell-Pearson, Keith. *Thinking Beyond the Human Condition*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018
- Ansell-Pearson, Keith, and Mullarkey, John. *Henri Bergson – key writings*. London: Continuum, 2002.
- Bergson, Henri. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Thomas Ernest Hulme. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.
- Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind*. Translated by Mabelle L. Andison. New York: Philosophical Library, 1946.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and free will: an essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. Translated by Frank Lubecki Pogson. Mineola: Dover Publications Inc., 2001.
- Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. Mineola: Dover Publications Inc., 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles, “Spinoza.” Seminar given on 25.11.1980 at University of Paris VIII, Vincennes, <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/17>
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Zone Books, 1988.
- Dryer, D.P. *Kant's Solution for Verification in Metaphysics*. New York: Routledge, 1966.
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir. *Henri Bergson*. Translated by Nils F. Schott. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Kleinherenbrink, Arjen, “Time, Duration and Freedom – Bergson's Critical Move Against Kant,” *Diametros* 39, no. 1 (2014): 203-230.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics – Revised edition*. Translated by Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Marcus Weigelt. London: Penguin Classics, 2007.
- Mullarkey, John. *Bergson and philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.



In This Issue

Behavioural Economics:

A Shaky Ground for Nudges

Annalisa Costella

7 - 16

Identifying the Other

Grotius and Erasmus on Bad Christians as Jews and Muslims

Julian Kiefer

17 - 26

A Phenomenological Defense of Radical Re-evaluation

Luc Middelkoop

27 - 42

Time Regained

Sander Tuus

43 - 59