Towards a Re-Delineation of the Human Self-Understanding within the Western Worldview: Its Social and Ethical Implications

Nicole Note

Leo Apostel Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CLEA)
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 1160 Brussels, Belgium
E-Mail: nnote@vub.ac.be

Hendrik Pinxten

Department of Comparative Sciences of Culture
Universiteit Gent, Rozier 44, 9000 Gent, Belgium
E-Mail: Hendrik.Pinxten@UGent.be

Diederik Aerts

Leo Apostel Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CLEA)
and Foundations of the Exact Sciences (FUND)
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 1160 Brussels, Belgium
E-Mail: diraerts@vub.ac.be

Abstract

This article focuses on the relation between worldviews, sciences and us. Its point of departure is the significant mutual influence of the Western worldview and sciences. It shows how the intertwined construction of science and worldview has modelled our conceptual self-understanding, our being and our acting. The issue is considered from a philosophical-anthropological stance, with due attention being given to past delineations and future alternatives. It is argued that, within the framework of the Western worldview, self-realisation is considered essential for being a human self. There is a tacit, yet conscious, agreement that the way to attain self-realisation is through the gradual development of two potentials: the rational potential and the potential for self-expression. The authors recognise that both are indispensable in forming the human self, but point out that the nature of the development of these potentials can conceptually be misinterpreted, causing

problems on the individual, societal and ecological levels. In order to prevent the development of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression from receiving undue emphasis, two more potentials are introduced on the conceptual level, to wit the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in and oriented towards a larger and meaningful whole. The assumption is that bringing these to the fore will also affect the very definition of self-realisation.

1   Introduction

In the Western views of the world and of the human self, it is a common idea that people — all alike — should be enabled to develop themselves gradually and constantly throughout the course of their lives. This self-realisation is implicitly thought to become feasible through the development of two potentialities: the intellectual potential and the potential for self-expression. Society is structured in such a way as to maximise the development of its members. People are stimulated to study life-long and many facilities are set up to foster the potentiality for self-expression [1]. The implicit driving principles behind this are two-fold: the principle of freedom (every member of society enjoys an equal basic freedom to determine their own lives) and the difference principle (every member of society can rely on an equal distribution of means, except insofar as inequality improves the situation of the poorest) [2].

Although in the Western worldview the emphasis is on these two capacities for self-realisation, we argue that it is highly desirable to acknowledge the ethical potential and the potential to be situated as essential for self-realisation. Firstly, we think that, implicitly, people already act as if these latter potentialities are important to them. Secondly, in daily reality there is an interference of the different potentialities, in the sense that strong expression of one potentiality may hamper the development of another. This is precisely what seems to be the problem with today's Western worldview, which is having a far-reaching impact on the social fabric. To the authors the outspoken actualisation of the intellectual potential and capacity for self-expression as opposed to that of the two introduced in this article, seems to be at the heart of such individual and societal problems as alienation, unbridled individual autonomy, and the fragmentation or moral disintegration

of society.

The idea that one expression may hamper the development of another is akin to Lyotard's notion of "le différend". In Lyotard, a "différend" is a conflict between two or more parties in which one of them cannot be a legitimate judge because of the absence of a rule that may be applied to all parties' argumentations. The fact that one position is considered legitimate should not automatically imply that the other positions are not [3, 4]. Hence, "un différend" is a dispute which cannot be settled since the rules available deny the position of at least one of the committed parties. It does them wrong ("tort"). Like Lyotard, we take it that structuring will invariably produce "différends". These "différends" are the negation of the existing order, and hence provide its borderlines.

Lyotard states that it is the philosopher's duty to "témoigner du différend", *i.e.* to make this discrepancy explicit. Philosophy needs to ensure that "the other" be heard. This should not be seen as a process of legitimation, because this would only create a new, all-embracing viewpoint negating or oppressing otherness. Lyotard seeks to develop alternative viewpoints which tackle the self-evident in order to make visible that which the self-evident conceals. This is a different approach from the more common one of falsifying existing discourses and practices within a certain (scientific) field.

This paper takes a similar course. Next to the existing potentialities, which are firmly established within modernity, we wish to bring to the fore the excluded potentialities, as well as its "natural" process of exclusion. Our basic assumptions both overlap and differ from those of Lyotard's. The following three points will clarify our position.

1. As we mentioned above, according to Lyotard, any conceptual ordering will create "différends". We agree that these "différends" have their own logic which cannot become clearly visible within the prevailing discourse. However, we do not perceive an ontological incommensurability between these different logics. Commensurability is possible by creating a conceptual meta-perspective in which both the prevailing or hegemonic and the different have a place of their own[1]. We intend to reach that goal by thinking in terms of potentials. In conceiving the two most important emancipatory pillars of society — the aptitude for rationality and self-expression — as potentials, it can be made apparent that the incommensurability with other logics is at the level of articulation or actualisation.

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[1]Since we are part of that very worldview, we do not think an objective outsider perspective is possible; this, however, does not prevent us from taking on some meta-perspectives.

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The ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a larger meaningful whole are "le différend". As we will make clear later in this paper, the ethical potential has been wrapped up in the rational potential of man, so that this potential has been reduced altogether to a specific rational discourse. The other mainstay of ethics, the "pre-rational being-touched-experience", cannot thoroughly be understood from within the rational logic. Moreover, this discourse does not seem to allow for conceiving ethics as a potential in itself, which is primordial for self-realisation. The same shortcoming is even more manifest in the case of the potential for being situated in a larger meaningful whole, which, within the Enlightenment articulation, has for a long time been classified as being synonymous with conservative tradition or religion, and even as restricting personal freedom. This logic has hampered people's ability to approach this central aspect in its non-articulated potential state, or to perceive its essential significance for human selves. The state, in staying "neutral" as to personal choices, has not fostered opportunities to develop this potential in diverse ways in the way it has for the rational potential and the potential for self-expression. It is our very strong conviction that, like the rational potential and their potential for self-expression, people, to become human selves, also need to be able to develop the two excluded potentials referred to above.

2. As a second point, we want to clarify our position on human autonomy or self-determination. If we are to believe Habermas, postmodernists should be labelled "neoconservatives"[5]. Habermas draws this conclusion on the basis of the following. Lyotard, as a postmodernist, is following the footprint first made by the Frankfurter Schule, of which Adorno and Horkheimer are prime exponents. Having experienced Nazism, they state that the instrument of emancipation — humans' own autonomy and rationality — is, in fact, at the same time the instrument of their destruction. They pessimistically conclude that once people take their fate in their own hands, it can only go wrong. From this perspective, the discourse of make-ability and controllability of man, society and nature becomes pure illusion [6].

Lyotard takes up a similar discourse. While Adorno and Horkheimer declare the emancipatory Enlightenment to be totalitarian due to its own rationality, Lyotard situates the totalitarian aspect in language itself. For Habermas, their positions make it impossible to acknowledge the modern claim to self-determination, hence his label of "neoconservatives". Contrary to postmodernists, his aim is to rescue the modernist project by stating that modernity is not dead but unfinished [7]. According to Habermas, there is still an unused rationality potential with which to complete this modernity

project, and which the postmodernists failed to see.

We do not aim to prove Habermas right or wrong; we just want to make clear our position within this discussion. From a cultural-anthropological perspective, we share the idea that the principle of human self-determination should not be open to discussion. However, by no means does this imply that we will automatically agree with all of its possible interpretations. In fact, we do not, as this article will make clear. Also, this principle does not cause us to adopt a universalistic, one-truth stance, although we neither opt for the other end of the scale, *i.e.* a relativist standpoint fostering indifference. Rather, we are inclined to subscribe to pluralism within a certain frame of reference. It is from within this context that our next point should be understood.

3. The third point reflects our position on the universality of research results — to which Lyotard is very much opposed. It may seem that we claim some universalistic truths, and to be fair, we do. In the tripartite postulate described above, we firstly perceive human selves as potentials to be developed, we secondly claim that the Western worldview is characterised by the implicit recognition of only two potentials as important to self-realisation, and we thirdly declare that the development of the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a larger whole is "le différend". This postulate introduces a universalistic flavour because it assumes that the development of these four potentialities — and not just the first two — is indispensable for humans to unfold their selves. Our viewpoint is that the four potentialities as bare, *empty* concepts, that is, in their state as potentialities, are nothing less than the *underlying* fundaments of self-realisation. Their *articulation* varies from one (sub)culture to another, but they are nevertheless articulated. The *degree* of their articulation also varies from one (sub)culture to another. There are cultures in which the different articulations of the potentials are not readily commensurable.

Acknowledging the need for further research to prove this hypothesis, the authors wish to relativise the supposed universality of their statements. They are aware that, at some later stage, other potentials that are currently excluded may be conceptually visualised as even more important, decreasing in importance. According to the authors, such an evolution reflects the very essence of investigation: on the one hand, researchers believe in the universality and importance of their work and goals — making sound involvement possible —, and on the other, they are aware of and accept the fleeting character of their insights — which may well be exclusive themselves.

This paper elaborates the four potentials. The first part deals with the first two, the way they came into mental existence, their articulation and

actualisation. The second part intends to provide handles for dealing with the ethical capacity, and the capacity for situating oneself in a larger whole. Before that, we will shortly define what we mean by potentiality, articulation and actualisation.

By *potentiality* we mean, as did Aristotle,[8] something existing as a possibility, something which is capable of turning into actuality under favourable conditions. Potentiality is the power to be, without yet actually being. It is different from being but also from non-being. Potentiality cannot be envisaged in itself. It can only be represented by way of a certain articulation. Although potentiality in itself "is", it needs to be recognised by humans as such in order to be.

Articulation is the mental conversion of that potentiality into meanings, ideas, intentions and discourses. The precipitation into a mental form makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to visualise yet another form. In society, different articulations co-exist. However, society as a whole is led by a more or less uniform bundle of articulations which are expressed as ideals, goals and orientations. Moreover, although articulation is inherently a reduction of potentiality, people cannot express potentiality but through its articulation. Expressing a potentiality is making it tangible, bringing it into consciousness and into existence. So articulating a potentiality is also reducing it; yet at the same time it is a creational act.

By *actualisation* we mean the (further) formation of this potentiality into materialised forms such as structures, artefacts or other embodiments. Actualisation has a connotation with static. Yet, because materialisation is the result of human endeavour, even manifested actualisations, seen over time, are dynamic processes, ready for change, for rise and fall, and for co-existence.

2   The modern perception of the human self

Prior to different ways of expressing and implementing potentialities, there is the deep level of believes we live with, a view of the human self and the world which we consider ontologically true and non-discussable. It is on this meta-level of worldviews that the human potentials have — implicitly — been recognised as such. At this level, too, changes occur over long periods of times. The current times in fact seem to present such changes, leaving society with different and fragmented meanings of reality existing side by side [9]. Yet, the fact that human beings have an intellectual capacity and a capacity for self-expression has not been subject to change or challenge;

only the way in which these capacities have developed has been open to criticism.

In the Western worldview, the development of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression have not always been judged as core building blocks for self-realisation; indeed, for ages, self-expression was not regarded as a potentiality altogether. Self-expression came into its full bloom only as a reaction to the particular development of the rational potential. In what follows we will try to show how these potentials came into being conceptually and how they have been articulated through time. We will first describe this process in neutral terms, and then show that somehow this articulation went "off track" by pointing to the negative consequences on a conceptual level. As we have said, we believe that these rather eccentric articulations are due to the conceptual ignorance of the fundamental worth that the ethical potentiality and the potentiality for being situated in a larger meaningful whole, have for self-realisation. As long as we are insufficiently aware of their existence, they cannot explicitly serve their function as conceptual beacons.

2.1   Potentialities perceived in modernity

The awareness and importance of the intellectual capacity and the capacity for self-expression have implicitly been acknowledged as basic principles within the tradition of the Enlightenment and Sciences. The historical move to radical reflection has been essential for both potentials. Moreover, self-expression as a potential is based on a deep belief in human dignity — precisely because of the human reflective ability — and the belief that people need to explore the depth of their inner selves.

In sketching these potentials — without pretending to be exhaustive —, we will draw extensively on Charles Taylor, who provides an in-depth and greatly balanced discussion of their crystallisations through time, although with another goal than ours [10].

As Taylor makes clear, reason has been an acknowledged capacity for ages. What has changed over time is the perception of rationality, the content of rationality on a meta level so to speak. Starting in Ancient Greece, we can see that, according to Plato, to be rational, not the mind (as a thinking agent) but the soul needed to be orientated in the right direction. In these pre-modern times one had to become touched by the love of the Ideas to be able to understand the surrounding things as they ontologically "were": as participating in the Ideas which gave them being. Hence, knowing the truth was a matter of conversion. Seeing and understanding the right order in turn was seeing the "Good", and associated with attaining one's "true

nature".

In the Middle Ages, Augustin's writings convincingly and emphatically made the point that God's ordering principles are not only outside, but also deep inside the human self. Augustin argued that God is in the intimacy of our souls. To really understand His order, people have to attain self-knowledge through intelligence. But, since people are sinful, they equally need to be healed from sin through intelligence and willpower. Self-knowledge and healing will eventually result in contact with perfection. This perfection is our own (hence the need to love our souls), as well as part of the higher good. According to Augustin, by going down inside ourselves, we also go up towards perfection. Augustin's approach redefined the rational potentiality *within us*, and in doing so he paved the way for a self-expressing potential inside us to be recognised. Augustin himself said: "If by 'abyss' we understand a great depth, is not man's heart an abyss? (...) Do not you believe that there is in man a deep so profound as to be hidden even from him in whom it is?"[11]

However, Augustin was already aware of the potential danger of this inward turn. He described as "evil" the situation in which rational reflection is locked into itself, when humans make themselves the centre of the world whilst dominating and possessing the outer environment. In such a situation, healing is when this self-centredness is broken up, dependence on God is acknowledged.

This "healing" line of thought is interesting, and we will elaborate on it in a while, relating this breaking up of self-centredness not with God, which is also a possibility, but with a reinvigoration of the two other human potentialities referred to above.

Descartes made Augustin's reflective stance and inwardness fundamental whilst further developing ideas about the nature of rationality. Descartes argued that for a true appreciation of our own being as immaterial (our real selves) as well as a reality outside us, we have to leave behind the false road of conceiving the world ontologically as self-revealing. We have to understand that there is an ontological split between our immaterial souls and a materialised world outside, of which our body is a part. This materialised world is devoid of any spiritual core or meaningful element. If we manage to grasp this ontological disposition of reality, we will experience the "innerwordly liberation" of the soul[2]. Recognition of the fissure enables us to disengage from the materialised world, and free ourselves from it. We will furthermore be allowed a greater understanding of reality the moment we realise that,

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[2][10], p. 146.

to achieve true insight, we must not turn outside but inside. Order and hierarchy need to be constructed by humans, who have the reflective ability to do so.

Of course, Descartes did not stand alone in tracing these new lines of thinking. He was rather a part of a tradition of "Modern" scientists such as Bacon, Kepler, Galileo, Boyle, Newton and many others, who stressed the prevalence of matter, and the mathematical and mechanical nature of the underlying ontological "being" of reality, thus giving form to a "rational" worldview [12]. This view gradually enabled the disenchantment of the world. From within this scientific frame, the leading element in people's lives no longer ought to be the senses (in the service of the super sensible Platonian soul) but reason. More and more, the hegemony of reason was regarded as that which offers humans the greatest satisfaction. From this moment on in history, we can notice the progressive reduction of rationality to the realm of "tangible" reality: that which is visible and can be explained in evolutionary, mechanical terms.

In Platonian times, the world order embodied the Good, which we cannot but love. Now that rational control has taken over as the primarily prevailing good, and the world is considered mere disenchanted material, meaningfulness has been reduced — or turned toward — man's sense of his own dignity as a rational being and the articulations sprouted from reason. One major consequence can be an increasing awareness of the self as a substantial self, a self that has a sense of worth *in its own eyes* and optimistically thinks of itself as a *causa sui*, the master of its own history[3].

Although this line of optimism has rightly met with great opposition, the belief in progress through science and technology is still very powerful, albeit on a more modest scale. To some, including Weber, our condition is no longer open to questioning.

Locke, being a Reformist, implicitly encouraged the development of two more important ontological branches within the potential of rationality, namely the importance of preservation and hedonism. Within the religious framework, Locke made his point convincingly by arguing that, since people have an instinctive urge to self-preservation, it must have been intended by God. Reformists at that time believed that they were called by God to perform a particular line of work, which imparted to their work a higher significance. As a consequence, it was supposed that people could serve God by working energetically (with efficiency and industry) and intelligently (towards the good of all). The combination of self-preservation and industry

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[3][10], part II.

on the one hand, and the pursuit of a better personal situation on the other, is still a leading economical concept nowadays.

Locke and others also gave a significant impulse for hedonism to be accepted. In doing so, they tended to the seeds sowed by Renaissance philosophers such as Erasmus and More. In Locke's eyes, God not only creates a world for our preservation, a world we can know through reason; He also invites us to enjoy this world. As a consequence, in principle, our intrinsic desire for pleasure is good (not withstanding our intrinsic tendency towards irrationality and evil). Kant added another seed for the acceptance of pleasure, upholding that the experience of beauty could lead to the experience of disinterest. And as Bacon said: in order not to be led away from God, people ought to take on an instrumental stance towards the things of creation. It would protect them against seeing these things as ends in themselves[4]. While Locke built on the hedonist branch of self-expression, Bacon created a spiritual meaning for instrumentality. Because of the persuasive power of their rationale, both stances have since been brought within the "normal" and hence, within the "accepted".

Arguments to enjoy life were subsequently worked out further by early utilitarianists, such as Hutcheson, as was the importance of the relief of pain. There was a strong and optimistic belief that self-love and social behaviour were one, that people would be freed from egoism and pursue the universal good if they rationally understood the importance of freeing the human race from suffering and enjoy life. Pleasure was still implicitly restricted because of its embeddedness in a social and moral context. At the same time, however, in France, a rational legitimisation was provided for another branch of hedonism, according to which man, in order to achieve the ultimate liberation, should forget about all social and moral standards. Although this legitimisation was contrary to what people usually intuitively felt to be correct, it has nevertheless had numerous followers up to our century, in which this kind of freedom is usually regarded as the most important value in life.

In the same period yet another mental branch developed: the importance of self-reliance. Self-reliance was given a strong impulse through the writings of Emerson and it is still very strongly present in the American self-understanding and a major driving force [13]. It is a common idea today that, although people are called by God, it is very rational to rely on oneself, and working hard is one way of doing that [14].

As Taylor describes in great detail, self-expression found its fullest "meta-

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[4][10], part III.

articulation" in the Romantic period, in which inwardness was further combined with inner depth, and with originality. And although this potential developed in reaction to the atomistically fragmented, instrumental and detached way in which the rational potential was scientifically articulated, materialism and science also played a particular role in this development.

Materialism challenged the Cartesian idea that the physical world was but inert material. It replaced God as the first mover by nature as a locus of force. All beings were perceived as tending to maintain themselves in their being. Furthermore, a growing awareness of geological time started to dawn, in which the immensity of time became clear. Nature thus became a locus of depth, an intrinsic source moving people and rousing their respect.

Rousseau added the language of man's "inner voice" deriving from nature. In contrast to the utilitarians, he made a distinction between different types of needs. To find the "good", the source of unity and wholeness, or again, to become entirely oneself, he said, was to live in agreement with this voice. The good was *defined* by this voice in nature, which we needed to *discover*.

The early articulation of this radical view by Rousseau, who, according to Taylor, never took this far-reaching step himself, further developed towards the deeper inwardness and radical autonomy as we live it today. The pursuit of becoming more and more in concordance with ourselves is considered to lead to the fulfilment of our everyday desires in a rich, complete and significant manner that responds to the natural stream of life. To manifest our sentiments, that which is hidden deep inside us, has now come to occupy a central place in our lives. Articulating means defining what is to be realised. The path for verbalisation is within. There is no sense in pursuing external models, or pre-defined formulations. Not hegemony but autonomy is important, in the sense that man now turns to his inner self for inspiration, primarily seeking contact with his own life-stream[5].

Hence, humans are currently visualised as expressing *a potential*, as having an inner space full of possibilities, a deepness which makes up their own, full authenticity. It is a richness they will never be able to fully know or express. The articulation of their own originality and authenticity is nonetheless what is supposed to lead today's free, self-determining people in shaping their lives meaningfully. They represent the ultimate emergence of self-conscious beings having a value in themselves, a value that cannot be questioned. The inner self is the only source of meaning and all meaningfulness flows back to it.

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[5][10], part IV.

2.2 Some worrisome developments

Rationality and self-expression have rightly become recognised as capacities. Throughout the ages, in the West, they have been reflected in specific conceptual maps for self-orientation. It has led humanity up a variety of positive roads, such as fundamental reflections on the awareness of human dignity and self-realisation, and the concern for all humanity. Sciences have very much contributed to this goal. The development of the two potentials that are mentioned before, has greatly helped people to reconsider their own lives and venture on new paths [15]. There are, however, also some worrisome conceptual evolutions, resulting in problematic situations on the individual, societal and ecological levels. Although these types of evolution are very much interlaced, we choose to make the following threefold distinction. Firstly, the combination of some discourses on freedom of choice may unwillingly produce a logic that calls on people to realise themselves first. Secondly, different ideas on the nature of rational thinking — such as disenchantment and economic thinking — may lead to an egocentric and instrumental logic. Both developments can take place because of a third troubling assumption, *i.e.* the idea that all meaning comes from within the human self.

It is our firm belief that the expansion of these disturbing evolutions, considered on a deeper level, is due to what we have earlier described as the existence of "différends". The rationality potential and the capacity for self-expression have precipitated, merging into a more or less uniform set of articulations of meanings that leave no mental space for the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a larger meaningful whole as broad *founding potentials.* Also, within these precipitated articulations, the meanings of certain concepts that refer to these unacknowledged potentials have come to be twisted or misunderstood to the extent that they now require unveiling. The specific nature of these articulations makes it difficult to perceive other precipitations, turning them into "différends". We will now discuss these two points, retaking and elaborating some of the earlier material.

2.2.1 The right to self-realisation

In the Enlightenment view, rationality and self-expression are rated highest on a conceptual level. Perceived from an individualistic perspective, it seems our primary right, indeed, our *duty* to realise ourselves. It is the role of the state to take care of the well-being of *all* its members. The state should pro-

vide the opportunities for people to develop these potentialities, and people should make use of them. Of course, people are free to assume responsibilities with regard to others, but they are made to believe that this is not indispensable for self-realisation. The generally resulting view of the human self facilitates a choice of "*oneself first*". A conceptual hierarchy has been created in which self-expression and the rational potential are perceived as primary goals to be reached in order to consider oneself a human self. As we will make clear, this view of life entails the danger that we become rationally egocentric, and that, moreover, we may tend to perceive our fellow-citizens from a negative judging framework.

The deeply rooted conviction that this specific self-realisation is up to ourselves is strongly supported by a series of ideas, which we have grouped into two overall parts. The first of these is subdivided into four points, but can be summarised as the importance of the freedom to determine one's own choice. The very fact, however, that in (political) philosophy these ideas on self-realisation have been so strongly ramified seems to prove the importance Western thinkers attach to it. We heavily lean on Kymlicka's overview in shortly citing them here.

1. One main discourse is known as *utilitarianism*. Its major underpinning idea is that experiencing pleasure is the key positive thing people can strive for. What that pleasure consists of cannot be valued. All choices are equally rational; there are no criteria to measure whether something is good or not. Therefore, all different experiences need to be promoted. Yet, the state needs to provide opportunities for people to inform them well about the possible advantages and disadvantages of choices. Progress is conceived as the maximisation of the preferences of *all* people concerned. Consequentialism — a branch of utilitarianism — distinguishes choices according to whether or not they have an effect on others, *i.e.* moral versus personal choices. An example of the latter is personal taste.

A very similar idea is that of *self-determination*. Self-determination assumes that we all pursue a "good" life. A significant number of philosophers agree that people's interests are best served if they can decide for themselves what kind of life to lead[6]. They equally argue that people cannot be wrong in choosing. Choosing is seen as a serious matter. Choices express our subjective likes and dislikes. In each case, some things are essential and others are trivial. People are supposed to take these differences seriously, even if they do not always know what this means. Self-determination means having

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[6]Kymlicka mentions the Utilitarists, the Liberals, the Libertarians and the Kantian Marxists, which he opposes to the Communitarianists [16]

the possibility to deliberate over — sometimes difficult — choices.

A libertarian discourse influencing our self-conception suggests that not pleasure, but *freedom* is the highest good. In claiming that freedom is intrinsically valuable, it is suggested that the more we pursue our choices, the freer we are and hence, the more valuable our lives become. It implies that the guiding principle of our acts is freedom, not the value residing in the action itself. Freedom is conceptually unlinked from the good that people strive to reach *by means of* freedom, such as dignity, material freedom, autonomy, well-being.

The strong belief that *individuals have rights that cannot be sacrificed to other people's well-being* is another powerful idea that has proved conducive to choosing for one's own interests first. Rawls argues that people who are born with a disadvantage have the right to make a claim onto more gifted people. Nozick refutes this argument, asserting that talents are the property of an individual. No other individual can claim any right to the fruits of this talent since in doing so this individual would be claiming a right to part of that very individual. Conceptually, the possibility to claim does not fit in with the idea of self-ownership.

2. Another reason why the idea of realising oneself can conceptually merge with the meaning of egocentrism is the implicitness of liberal core values. According to Kymlicka, for their theory to work, liberals presuppose a natural sociability. The pursuit of freedom sprouts from the belief that humans are social animals using their freedom to achieve common goals. Hence, liberals implicitly perceive a social life as the highest goal, and as a *sine qua non* for developing a sense of morality and rationality.

Kymlicka in his book rightly wants to stress the utmost importance of these tacit postulates. As he says, their implicitness makes the theory weak. Whereas the assumptions about individual rights and personal freedom are clearly expressed, the underlying assumption is not, allowing room for a conceptual slip into egocentrism. A person may now conceive of himself as disembedded [17]. Freedom — in liberal political philosophy envisaged as minimal interference with the personal lives of individuals by the state and the church — can now become visualised as freedom from all bonds. Or *vice versa*, all bonds can be perceived as interference with one's personal life.

This line of thought has been elaborated by the Belgian sociologist Elchardus, who introduces the concept of "ethics of limitlessness". Elchardus makes clear that people perceiving the world from within this frame of reference, picture freedom as the possibility to abolish all institutional and social limits, even solidarity with the community. To them, relationships are only

interesting in relation to their self-realisation, in which people are considered to play an instrumental role [18].

The series of thoughts listed above and the implicitness of liberal core values have the secondary effect of providing individuals with a *negative judging framework* with regard to fellow citizens. From within this fused framework, the meaning of the theory of equality can be turned upside down. In origin, this theory states that people can only be held responsible for the choices they make if these occur under fair conditions. To make for a fair initial situation, the state is entitled to help out financially the less fortunate. However, from within a frame of reference in which the primary obligation is to realise oneself, — also economically — this state intervention can be given a different weight. People receiving state support may then be conceived as putative cheats, feigning their situation out of laziness. If a person fails in life, this may be explained from his or her not having worked hard enough, since a less favourable situation is considered to derive from one's own "choice". Rather than being entitled to support, that person should be blamed for failing. Due to the possibility of such stigmatisation, the less fortunate may feel ashamed and refrain from revealing their situation. As Kymlicka indicates, perceiving these people as abusers will lead to erosion instead of fortification of solidarity and mutual concern between citizens[7].

2.2.2 The merging of "rational thinking" with egocentrism and instrumentality

A second worrisome conceptual evolution is the one in which thinking rationally becomes synonymous — merges — with egocentrism and instrumentality. The way we are supposed to think and act in order to be categorised within the norm of the rationally accepted is very subtly demarcated in all cultures. In Western culture, at least three main pillars can be distinguished. Firstly, to be rational is to acknowledge that self-determination is a high "good". We commented on this topic in the previous point. Secondly, in order to determine one's own life — and getting to fully know it — one needs to understand that the world is disenchanted. Thirdly, to think and act rationally is to see oneself as a "*homo economicus*", as a responsible, self-reliant and saving adult.

Although not negative *per se*, these three pillars may unintentionally encourage the development of a conceptual image of the self as concerned

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[7][16], p. 88.

with self-interest *first*. It may thus become natural to perceive the social and natural environments as instruments to be used on the journey of one's self-realisation.

a. Disenchantment

As we have seen, a profound and long-lasting change within the development of the rationality potential was the way that people came to look upon their relation with external reality, which conceptually shifted from enchantment to *disenchantment* through the elimination of magic and religion. Two goals were aimed at with that shift: progress in the form of freedom for humankind, and an appropriate epistemology for knowing the world, in order to further support progress.

As said before, the freedom to choose is a powerful striving in Western culture. Differently stated, it is the freedom to consciously determine one's own life. To be able to do so, humankind needed to shed two fundamental determinants of their lives: magic and religion. Magic, in the form of influence of environmental forces and ancestors, or *vice versa* as a way to influence destiny, was deeply embedded in rational thinking. It took scientists ages to conceptually relegate this complex ramified concept to the margins of Western thinking and lock it up in the cage of irrationally labelled concepts. Many scientists took their share in this, re-labelling the concept. For example, in the 19th century, Tylor was one of several anthropological scientists who studied other cultures with the indirect aim to rid Western culture of any Christian and Celtic magic related perceptions, labelling such practices as "superstition"[19]. Long before him, Locke already had taken some first steps to reverse the psychological dependency on the earth, which was still very strong in his days. He introduced a conceptual twist, stating that it was not the earth that took care of man — and had power over man — but man who took care of himself through his own effort by working the land. To make his point clear, Locke compared the Europeans' wealth with the Indians' poverty, in a subtle way also highlighting the supposed superiority of the Western race [20].

So to come back to our statement, what we see happening here is that due to an elimination of the ramified concept of "magic" a shift in the conceptual significance of the earth took place. The earth was stripped of her forces, and in that sense reduced to something material. Conceptually, in our worldview, the earth has moved down from a position in which it was considered equal to human (visualised and spoken of in terms of a power, of nurturing and caring being) to a merely materialist level (regarded as an object). It is this very conceptual shift that has paved the way for the logic

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of instrumentality — an evolution which no doubt is one of the main roots of today's ecological problems.

However, the bizarre thing is that on the level of *experience* we still feel nature to be "living", something which can "touch" us, something that can "give" us energy. Here we can see a clear discrepancy between our human experience and the conceptual detached stance we have learned to adopt as correct from a rational point of view [21].

In determining one's own life, not only magic, but also religion — God — is a difficult "concept" to work around. As is well known, scientific findings, in particular Darwin's , brought about a mental revolution seemingly leaving no more place for the existence of God. From then on in the Western world, a debate has been going on about whether or not it may be considered rational to believe in the existence of God. Scientists do not agree on what it precisely means to think rationally on this subject. While some still adhere to a creational vision — even banning revolutionist theories from schools and universities — others no longer believe in the traditional interpretations of God and the Universe. Even so, a significant number of representatives of the latter current still believe in something "indefinable".

Since the existence of God as the first principle has been put in doubt by scientific findings, the *causa sui* principle could as it were take its place, in which humans could be seen as masters of at least their own world. Although in the last few decades this view has come under serious pressure from genetic determination, the thought that man's rationality makes him superior to other beings on earth and allows him to give meaning to life, is not waning. It is that very thought which can lead to an egocentric and instrumental logic.

Within the scientific Enlightenment worldview, a belief in anything undefined is regarded as rather outlandish, or else, Lyotard's "différend". Believing can by no way be captured within the two-dimensional potential frame of reference that determines the image of the human self. Differently expressed, the two potentialities of the Enlightenment framework are incapable of satisfying all man's needs to feel human, although it is tacitly — but not unconsciously — presumed they can. Part two of this article, introducing man's potential to be situated in a larger, meaningful whole, intends to make clear that believing is one way of expressing this potential. However, we also want to make clear that it is not the only way. Where we are up to is the *conceptual recognition* of this potential. Today, this recognition seems to have become conceptually excluded, precisely and lamentably because of a discussion taking place on the level of some of its articulations.

To take up the thread of the article: to be free man needed not only to

abolish magic and religion, but also to have some control over the world[8].

As we have seen, scientifically used epistemology stimulated an "objectivist" detached stance towards nature. For quite some decades now, quantum physics has been supplementing objectivity in science by the paradigm of indeterminism and participation as a way for knowing reality. However, although popularised,[9] this knowledge has never really challenged the detached objectivism approach to social reality. So in its pursuit of social progress, the Western world is still led by a "rationality" with the meaning of "efficiency", "controllability", detached concernedness, and implicitly, the power to change. Because of this tight conceptual connection, any changes can only occur over long periods of time. That is why, for instance, although alternative views of sustainability have conceptually already moved from the romantic naïve (irrational) to the rational forum, they are still being considered too soft to be able to play a role in leading the world to progress.

b. Self-interest

Next to disenchantment, another very important conceptual thought has been linked to rationality. It is the discourse that maintains that, in order to be rational, humans need to think in terms of their own benefit. If we trace back the historical line of this idea, we can see that in earlier times self-interest was considered a vice.[10].

Mandeville seemed to have been one of the first to reformulate that principle. He stated that egoism can have positive effects on society. The same idea was taken up by Adam Smith and later by John Keynes. Both these economic scientists were optimistically persuaded that self-interest would lead to the benefit of all people. The invisible hand of the market would help the process of redistribution. Keynes made a plea for self-interest on

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[8] "Control" as such should not always be perceived in a negative way, as is the case in some alter-globalisation movements. By controlling circumstances we also mean, for instance, controlling diseases such as pestilence and cholera by way of science [22]

[9] A great many popular science books have re-enchanted man's existence, such as "What is life", Erwin Schrödinger, or James Watson, "In Search of the Double Helix". The dissemination of popular scientific ideas entered a new era when television became interested in the matter. Many, mostly BBC, series followed Charles Bronowsky's original "The Ascent of Man". There has also been an exploitation of archetypical science models by the popular entertainment business in films such as Star Trek, Star Wars, The Matrix, and many other, often fascinating philosophical questions about the nature of our world and man's place in and relation with this world are put forward.

[10] Notwithstanding — or maybe precisely as a reaction to — the fact that the Hobbean discourse paints another kind of human "being", according to which people will relentlessly choose the best for themselves, ignoring other people's states of being in the war of every man against every man [23]

rational grounds, arguing "that fair is foul, and foul is fair, for foul is useful, and fair is not. Greed, usury and precaution will have to be our gods for a long while. For only they are able to guide us out of the tunnel of economic need into the daylights"[24]. He — and others — presumed that these vices would be overcome by virtue once abundance was achieved.

In order to make predictions and calculations, economic theories assume that humans are employing relevant efficiency-based economic rules all the time. They presuppose rational agents looking for maximum profits. Of course, scientists know their basic assumptions do not totally overlap with social reality, considering them only appropriate working definitions. However, somehow this implicit knowledge seems to have disappeared along the way so that today we are stuck with the awkward situation of a fusion of economic egocentrism and rationality. The "*homo economicus*" image is deeply engraved in the minds of people as a truly inherent human component. People tacitly believe they have to live up to it.

A firm interiorisation of the economic and rational connection favours self-interest, rationally legitimising it as a positive thing. As a consequence, the economic discourse transforms opposed perspectives — such as the act of giving — into "le différend", because disinterested behaviour cannot be understood anymore within a culture whose members pursue their own interests and profit maximisation. Godbout and Caille make this lucid by showing how any act of giving must necessarily be considered an odd thing from the perspective of economic thinking. He states that economic scientists do not understand why gifts still exist. They attempt to find an explanation by pointing to the vestiges of an older morality or a supposing that a gift is a form of self-interest. Godbout illustrates very keenly how a different vision is possible if we invert the perspective of human functioning. Instead of starting from the premise of economic instrumental self-interest, and seeking explanations for the supposedly bizarre phenomenon of a gift, he postulates that humans have an urge to give. The important question then is what mental and actual processes prevent people from giving [25, 26]. In suggesting this alternative, Godbout is offering an adjusted vision of human self-understanding. This vision is certainly much more in line with daily social reality, since people's exchange of material and immaterial things is still often based on disinterested giving. We are convinced that an active encouragement of the gift discourse would strongly counteract the discourse on egocentrism — and hence its effects on society and the environment. It would provide a mental and conceptual discourse about how people are or ought to be, allowing them to recognise their implicit behaviour, and allowing such behaviour to be considered natural rather than bizarre or odd.

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Lastly, the economic efficiency discourse, in addition to profoundly influencing the personal conceptual level towards a selfish instrumental road, also has an all-embracing effect on the way people structure their society. Important in this respect is the fact that bureaucratic institutional structures unintentionally direct people's thinking. They have an important influence on the way of functioning of individuals embedded in their context. This context is very accurately described by Habermas in his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* as "the colonisation of the lifeworld by the instrumental-strategic imperatives of the system"; a colonisation which he sees as still going on today, and which has as a consequence a great number of crisis phenomena, such as loss of collective insecurity and meaning, and loss of tradition; or, on the personal level, alienation and psychopathologies [27]. What we want to make clear here with regard to the conceptual level is that due to what one could call "actualisation inertia", it is much more complex to change discourses once they are firmly embedded in these bureaucratic societal structures. The longer a certain articulation has been in the running, and the more it has been translated into certain institutional structures, the harder it is for this specific articulation to die a silent death, and the more difficult it will be for another articulation to develop. Otherwise stated, it will become very difficult to see the existent articulation (for instance the fusion of economic egocentrism/instrumentalism with rationality) as *one* of several possible articulations; instead, it will be conceived of as the *only* articulation possible.

2.2.3 The discourse on all meaning coming from within

The question why the articulations of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression in combination lead to a conceptual perspective of egocentrism and an instrumentality, while they are in fact intended to serve the goals of liberation and personal development of all, can partly be answered by referring to *man's ignored or concealed tendency to follow guidelines.*

From within the neo-liberal discourse, people are enlightened by the idea that all meaning comes from within themselves. Western individuals tacitly learned that their culture — as opposed to other cultures — is not led by an overall, externally imposed worldview. Western culture is supposed to have freed itself from meta-narratives such as religion or Marxism[11]. As a result, people within that culture are thought to independently pursue an

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[11]J. F. Lyotard was the first to introduce the idea of "meta-narratives" or "future-oriented myths" , which he explained in greater detail in [28].

autonomous inner voice, and not any longer to follow parameters imposed from the outside.

According to Kymlicka, Taylor has made it convincingly clear that this commonly accepted perspective fails to acknowledge part of reality. Taylor elucidated that we are guided by so-called hypergoods in such an implicit way as to make us perceive them as basic moral intuition. These autonomous basic intuitions are revealed as deep collectively acquired values ("goods"), which are subject to change over long periods of time[12]. So there is a collective level by which we are influenced, and which we cannot just ignore. The Flemish philosopher Burms concentrates more directly on the insights behind this phenomenon,[29] stating that something is appealing the moment we are fascinated by it. Our fascination stems from our cultural background, not merely from an independent choice, coming out of the depths of ourselves. *Prior* to the choices we make (to become an artist, a judge...) we are always *a priori* appealed by a cultural constellation[13].

Using Taylor's and Burm's insights, we want to focus on *recent* guidelines people have been tacitly receiving through the combined articulations of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression. These are fresh guidelines, and have not yet been interiorised, so that they cannot yet be considered hypergoods. Indeed, they are contra-intuitive to the basic intuitions Taylor describes. But they nevertheless have an appealing tendency, because they are provided by the community and are part of our cultural constellation. Even if these recent guidelines may at first seem contra-intuitive, they strike us as "true" due to their rationale, so that people may implicitly come to regard them more and more as pursuable.

By way of illustration, we will give a concrete example of how these fresh guidelines appeal and of the appeal itself. During the period in which we prepared this article, the far-right party of Flanders gained many votes. To counteract this movement, the other parties agreed to establish a "cordon sanitaire", committing themselves not to govern with the above party. Contrary to their policy, however, policymakers adopted more and more items from the far-right party in their discourses. Their arguments for doing so varied, an important one being that the people were voting for such a line of policy. And since they, the policymakers, are their representa-

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[12][16], p. 221.

[13]Liberals such as Rawls and Dworkin recently acknowledged the social and cultural embeddedness of a person. The debate on societal matters between liberals, communitarianists, and people having a point of view somewhere in between has since then shifted to the *extent* of this context (a small or a thick cultural context) and — maybe even more — to what degree the state should intervene to protect this background. See [16], p. 270.

tives, democracy requires that they comply with the wishes of the citizens. Also, policy-makers saw this approach as a more subtle way to diminish the far-right party's momentum.

In this kind of argumentation one can clearly sense the ignorance of the principle *that* people follow guidelines, as well as the ignorance of the compelling force of guidelines. Citizens do not autonomously vote for something in the sense that they follow their own original ideas from within, as is usually assumed. Instead, they respond to something which is appealing to them. *Today's* appeal of simplistic racists' ideas is at least partly due to the fact that policymakers are adopting themes from the far-right. This encourages a certain way of thinking to become generally established. Since the Holocaust, this way of thinking had culturally been considered improper and banned to the margins of what was thinkable, as a result of which these ideas could *not* be appealing anymore. Any solution aimed to counteract the far-right should therefore not be sought in adopting their discourses but in a conceptual redefinition and re-categorisation of these themes in such a way that the racist perspective may again become the odd element, "le différend". By bringing to the fore the ethical perspective and the potential to be situated in a larger and meaningful whole, as this paper seeks to do, we may be taking a first step towards a necessary change in perspective on a more fundamental level.

Concluding, one could say that the implicit but conscious recognition of the rational and self-expression potentials as fundamental potentials for the development of human selves is a positive evolution. To be able to understand ourselves as human selves, it is absolutely required that they be developed. However, because of their "potential" state, they allow different articulations or precipitations in ideas, discourses *etc.* These articulations create "différends", in the sense that they hinder the conceptual formation of certain crucial insights. In the above sections we wanted to stress that the precipitated forms of these potentials in Western culture unintentionally serve as facilitators for certain concerns and practices that nobody is really happy with. Because of the expansion of this Western perspective, it has left us with non-desired consequences on a worldwide scale.

In the second part of this article, we will suggest ways to overcome at least some of the problems present at different levels of society. It is our intention to try to undo the tacit fusion of meaning of rationalism and self-expression with egocentrism and instrumentalism. This fusion is the result of a cluster of intermediate links, including links with enchantment, economy or utilitarianism. By introducing two more potentials as founding potentials for the human self — the ethical potential and the potential to be situated

in a larger whole — we aim at redefining the meaning of "being a self" or self-realisation, so as to make room for a more adapted linking of meanings. We think that trying to generate insights on this conceptual level is very basic, since it is the layer that serves as the foundation of the bureaucratic-institutional pillars that structure society. This paper only offers some first steps in this direction.

3 An adjusted self-understanding

In our attempt to prevent the undue development of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression, we will introduce the two additional potentialities already discussed above[14]. Although they are by no means unknown in the human discourse, they have not yet been recognised as potentials, and what is more, neither has their development been considered central to self-realisation. The ethical potential has been categorised as an extensive part of rationality, as our moral rationality.[15]. Being and acting in a correct ethical way has thus been brought in relation with third persons, with the intention of reaching a global ethical society, precisely because of our rational capacity. What has systematically been neglected, heavily underestimated, or even totally misunderstood is the utmost significance the development of the ethical potential can have for leading a broader meaningful life as an individual and for societal and environmental cohabitation.

The potential for being situated/oriented has also been sensed throughout the ages, but implicitly its articulation, by way of a relation with nature, with the community and with ethics/religion, has very often been negatively connotated. The feeling of being situated in nature has been associated with Romanticism, or expressed in New Age terms. Both merging movements are tacitly associated with irrationality. Situatedness in a community, although accepted to a certain degree, is nevertheless surrounded by an air of suspicion due to its connotation with nationalism, in which a person's will is subordinate to that of the nation [31]. The view of religion as providing moral guidelines has largely fused, on the conceptual level, with superstitious bondage and lack of freedom. Religious fundamentalism is only feeding that association. There is no denying that we need to take a critical approach to such expressions, but we may have to make a distinction between "something deeper" and its *expression*. What we want to describe

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[14]For this section, see also [30].

[15]Jürgen Habermas, as one of today's main authors in the field of ethics, also very clearly links (normative) ethics with rationality and (thus) universality.

is this potential in its stripped, non-articulated and de-associated state, as a basic constitutive fundament for self-realisation. It might lead to a shift from eliminating or judging as a whole *the very possibility* of expressing this potential, to trying to influence the way this potential is expressed.

The following sections will put both capacities in a new light trying to avoid the obsolete and dichotomising categorisations referred to above. Insofar as this has not become clear already, we wish to point out that, although both potentials are treated separately here, they are strongly interwoven; in fact, the same can be said of all four of them.

3.1 The ethical potential

If we say that humans have an ethical component, we are telling nothing new, of course. Quite the contrary, what it means to "be" and "behave ethically" has featured strongly in the self-image of the Western human self throughout history. However, the kind of ethics we want to stress differs from this generally accepted vision. As we said in the introduction, it is a very common thought that humans are ethical *because* they are rational. This assumption has resulted in categorical imperatives, clear and strict rational guiding rules on how to act in moral situations.

Of course, we do not deny that there is a rational element in the ethical, but ethics cannot just be reduced to its rational component. Ethics is made up of a series of elements. The following aims to describe these different constituents of ethics, pointing out that by reducing ethics to the rational level, it is paradoxically nipped in the bud.

According to Levinas, ethics is in the very first place not something we can rationally learn, but something we experience. Experiencing may even not be the right word, since this concept might still refer to a conscious level. What Levinas is pointing to is the level of the pre-reflective. To fully capture these constituent parts of ethics, we have to become more deeply involved in his line of thought — or at least, our (simplified) interpretation of it.

Levinas in fact implicitly perceives ethics as a potential, considering it to be formed and appealed to time and again on a pre-reflective level. This potential is articulated because of our basic ability to recognise pain and pleasure, and the ability for being touched, which is a momentary event.

The ability to recognise pain and pleasure sprouts from the very nature of human life, based as it is on shared existence and shared (existential) experiences. We, people, find our lives fundamentally valuable; in general we are intrinsically attached to it. In living this way we confidently believe

we can manage the reality that surrounds us. As independent beings, we feel at home in our bodies, reaching out to the world. On the one hand, we enjoy ourselves and the world around, but on the other hand, we can experience pain or illness, which, if serious, confront us with the fact that we are dependent, being locked in our own body, and left at the mercy of others.

The two opposed aspects of independency and dependency can both be felt, which is a pre-condition for people to be ethical. Not only can we fully comprehend other people's self-attachment, we can equally understand their suffering dependency [32, 33].

To be touched by somebody's suffering is something we cannot prevent from happening. As Levinas explains, the act of being touched happens in the momentaneous. Levinas, but also Deleuze make clear that the present is something we cannot get a grip on [34]. We can only get hold of what happened *already*, that is, the past. Of course, we can anticipate and *expect* what will happen in the future. But we can never be sure until it really happened. Hence, our mind has no active access to the immediate. Reflection is always — a fragment of a second — late.

This incapability of the consciousness to really grasp the present is our weak point, since it means that we are not in control of what happens in us at any particular moment. Our inner door is always ajar, as it were. We cannot prevent some things from slipping in, which is precisely what happens. In an instant, we are touched by a person's suffering, by the genuine vulnerability visible in the other's face. In a split second, other people break into ourselves, claiming us without permission. However, these other persons do not intend to enter our reality uninvitedly. It happens and neither of the two has any control over it. The incident is pre-reflective and in that sense, a passive event.

Paradoxically, however, our weak point is also our strong point. It opens the possibility to become ethical beings. When we are touched — pre-reflectively, in the immediate present — for instance, by the look in somebody's face expressing a unilateral but unavoidable request for help, something in us changes. We are pulled away from our own suffering and enjoyment, our attention turning from ourselves towards the other. We no longer experience this other person as something we can (in an unconscious way) instrumentally make use of, as a possible means to satisfy our needs, solace for our pains or a medium for our happiness. Instead, we will start seeing him or her as an individual self, a self we cannot just reduce to an element of our own world, but a self who, on the contrary, very much transcends us in his or her vulnerability, and whose unsolicited calls arouse a latent as-

piration in us to respond. It is this ability to respond, this "respons-ability", which makes the development of an ethical potentiality in us possible. This potentiality sets a boundary for what is — ethically — considered not tolerable anymore. At such moments — starting already in very early childhood — we become ethical beings. There is no way back. This ethical potential, in its potentiality, cannot be described linguistically. In its indefiniteness, it can only be partly captured by non-conceptions as "justice" (Derrida), "responsibility" (Levinas), "no cruelty" (Rorty) or "empty law" (Lyotard). From within this potentiality, people can react differently from one situation to another, depending on the development of this potential in their personal lives, and given that every situation indeed is different.

Being touched does not only make possible the coming into "being", or the coming into "reality" of the ethical potentiality; each appeal from the other and third persons ("le tiers") addresses this potential again. Appeals are endless and pre-reflective; the possibility to respond, however, is finite. We cannot possibly respond to each appeal. Responding is therefore a semi-consciously controlled act, a deliberation. Here, reflection comes in on the subconscious — and sometimes conscious — level.

To return to the main line of this article, we will now turn our focus from the emergence and maintenance of this appeal, to a discussion of how the Enlightenment worldview makes this ethic potential a "différend". It does so in two ways. Firstly, its discourse hampers the aspiration to respond, and secondly, its discourse makes a conceptual acknowledgment of the being-touched "experience" — a core element for being ethical — almost impossible.

3.1.1 Hampering the aspiration to respond

As for the first point, discourses in the Western Enlightenment worldview conceptual lead our semi-rational deliberations *away* from the aspiration to respond. There is an implicit but not unconscious double, interlaced conceptual threat in which on the one hand the uniqueness of one's *own* capacities is stressed, whilst on the other hand the significance of *other* people's vulnerability is minimised. Regarding the uniqueness, we saw in the first part that this was filled in as the duty for developing our own origin-ality, and the duty to think rationally — the latter fusing meanings with a disenchanted and self-interested economic way of thinking and acting. Since our worldview tacitly reassures us in making this choice for the "self first", it influences our semi-conscious balance between on the one hand choosing for ourselves, and on the other hand the pre-reflective touching

appeal of the other in favour of an inclination to the first. As we saw in part one, and as our collective view of the self tends to ignore, in a subtle way we tend to follow guidelines.

The second part of the conceptual approach influences our view of others. With regard to our judging of less fortunate fellow citizens, the Enlightenment discourse involuntarily stimulates to adopt a perspective of caution. The visible vulnerability on the face of the other by which, in a first immediate instance, we cannot but be deeply touched, can be rationally dismissed in this Western conceptual framework. A reinterpretation of this vulnerability is implicitly encouraged by conceptually linking it to the idea that it is all their "own responsibility and own fault because of laziness", or even worse, by suggesting that the other is *feigning* vulnerability in order to deceive us.

In theory, this conceptual evolution should leave us with a society dominated by egocentrically acting beings. In practical daily life, however, this seems not truly to be the case; people still significantly respond to the vulnerability of others. Hence, we have the awkward situation in which the conceptual framework makes people inclined to see *others* in their society as egocentric or cheaters, and yet perceive themselves as ethical beings — and act accordingly.

We saw that the Enlightenment discourse may render it more difficult for an ethical deliberation to precipitate into a response to an appeal. To make ourselves clear, we do not assume that people can or will respond all the time. Rather, we are aimed at one level above that decision. What we want to make clear is that the Enlightenment discourse — unintentionally — provides a certain image of ourselves which can lead to instrumental and egocentric self-understanding. Levinas broadens this self-understanding by conceptually re-introducing material which unfortunately has been relegated to a dark corner of our worldview. Thanks to Levinas, we can understand the significance of the ethical potential in us, the importance of unfolding our respons-ability, the desire to be responsible in order to become "truly" human. Levinas emphatically postulates the question whether we really dare to call ourselves humans if we are but concerned for our own selves[16].

Recognising ourselves as ethical human beings, will influence our way

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[16]This statement, of course, is not entirely new. According to Taylor, Huntington already had such insights. To Taylor, Huntington believed that if in any way we fail to recognise the benevolence of nature, it stifles and cripples our moral sentiments. "Not believing in our own moral inclination dampens them, and recognising them gives them strength. In acknowledging the mainsprings of good in us, we rejoice them, and this joy makes them flow stronger [. . .] Seeing the good in ourselves and in others releases this good and intensifies it." ([10], p. 261)

of making choices. These choices will then still be autonomous, each time again, but the one-sidedness of the tools with which people deliberate, will be extended, which in our view will lead to more balanced outcomes.

3.1.2 The being touched "experience", a conceptual "différend"

The Enlightenment discourse also profoundly hampers the possibility for a conceptual acknowledgment of the being-touched "experience", because its worldview hinders the vision that meaning also comes from within. Acknowledging the being-touched experiences is acknowledging that meaning can be provided from outside. In discussing the worrisome evolutions, we already mentioned the cultural conceptual level of guidelines we follow. One could see this as the first level on which reality surpasses us. There is, however, a second pre-cultural level by which we get surpassed, which we "feel" as the level of the being-touched experience. At this level, we understand that language and our thoughts are not able to capture this whole experience. In seeing somebody else's joy and suffering, one can sympathise — the result will be an approximation — but one will never be able to feel what the other is feeling. One is not able to utter fully in words what one sees in the face of the other. That is when one realises the limited capacity of language. Language cannot fully express the manifold dimensions of what is "experienced" in that pre-reflective moment. If one tries to analyse or describe it, part of it inevitably will not be grasped.

This very complex moment of being touched, as worked out by Levinas, has no conceptual place in today's discourse. In the Enlightenment discourse, the objectivistic discourse still triumphs, which states that everything is knowable. It does not leave room for the opposite thought that *not* all is knowable. As Burms says, the transcendental is depicted as a justification of the real [35]. In the language of this article, we would say that it is reduced to the tangible reality, in the sense that the phenomenon of being touched is considered totally knowable, expressable and explanable. It is assumed that nothing is left out of analysis.

It is for this latter reason that the very possibility of ethics is nipped in the bud. We do ethics wrong, we do not really understand it. Hence, one cannot expect society to encourage ethical citizenship, whilst at the same moment conceptually reducing the basic core of ethics, the being touched experience which triggers the ethical reaction, to a "différend", and thus conceptually excluding it. It matters all the more when one becomes aware that indeed citizens let themselves be guided by collective ideas, that the conceptual level makes up an important tool by which people understand

the world and shape their self-understanding.

Being touched and being appealed is also what relates people to one another. It is the level on which people understand each other without words. What differs, however, is the reaction, the articulation, its cultural or contextual colouring. The more cultural colouring, in the sense of strict explicit or implicit rules on how to ethically respond in a given culture, the less possibility there will be for individual deliberation.

3.2 The potential to be situated in and orientated towards a larger, meaningful whole

To understand what we are aiming at by conceptually bringing this potential to the mental fore, we need to de-link and re-link the meanings associated with some of the notions used in describing the potentiality, such as "being situated", or "being touched". We will first retake the notion of being touched and its surpassing aspect, by focussing on a three-ontology world and by bringing to the fore three horizons. In doing so we clarify what we understand by a larger, meaningful whole. Secondly, we will make clear what we comprehend by "being situated" and "oriented". Whilst doing so, we will try to indicate how a conceptual shift can influence our way of perceiving our relation with society and nature. Thirdly, we hope to be able to show that, for self-realisation, the possibility to develop this potential is as primordial as the development of the rational, the ethical and the self-expressing potentials.

3.2.1 The three-ontology world

As one of the authors already worked out in a previous paper,[36] a larger meaningful whole is subdivided into three "horizons", the ethical horizon, the social horizon and the physical horizon. We wanted to re-introduce these horizons conceptually as a reaction against the misleading conceptual frame of reference that claims that our decisions on what we wish to be bound by depend solely on ourselves. Within this misleading framework, the ethical, the cultural and the physical can be visualised only in a one-ontology world (see below), which reduces its meaning. So the ethical horizon can only partly be described as rules and norms to which we collectively adhere. The social-historical horizon can be depicted as the community we live in, as well as the community of human beings all over the world. The physical horizon seems simply to be no more than the natural environment we inhabit. However, all three worlds also have a surpassing tendency, which precisely makes

up their horizontal function. It is this tendency to conceptualise them again as horizons, and not only as tangible, here-and-now worlds, we aim to bring to the fore. In mentally acknowledging their transcendent part, in making it part of our world of incontestable "beliefs", people may be able to develop more clearly a feeling of being attached to them and so indispensably feel committed to them. Articulating the surpassing tendency on a conceptual level, articulating it within our worldview may therefore encourage our proclivity for "the good".

In order to be able to take the step from a single to a multi-level dimension, to perceive these worlds also as horizons, we will rely on Habermas' concepts. We do not take over the full meaning behind Habermas' concepts; instead, we will adjust them to fit our context.

In order to develop his theoretic communication paradigm, Habermas introduces different models of acting. He states that by making choices between these models of acting, each scientist implicitly but inevitably makes presuppositions with regard to possible relations between an actor and his world. Of interest to us are precisely these ontologies, because we think not only scientists inevitably "use" them to look at the world, but also "common" people. We very much believe that the ontology of common people is very strongly influenced by their worldview, of which science is a very important part, and by which they understand the world. As will become clear, we think that — implicitly — people now have taken it for granted to conceive the world *conceptually* as a one-ontology world. However, on the level of implicit experiencing, they still live reality from within a three-ontology world. It is our strong conviction that these implicit experiences need to be implicitly — or even explicitly — acknowledged at the conceptual level in order for people to be ethical beings, and to become "full" human persons in the sense that they can be able to situate themselves in a larger meaningful whole. We will now further explain what we mean by this.

In a one-ontology world — a subject–object world —, an agent assumes but the existence of an objective world from which he can gain knowledge, and in which he can manipulatively interfere. This subject makes rational reflections with regard to the means to be used for achieving an envisaged goal. Rationality of acting here is measured in terms of "efficiency" and "truth". An example of this world is the economic way of acting, or the scientific objectivist way of doing research. Interesting to us is that Habermas also situates Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of instrumental rationality at this level[17]. He states that the conceptual apparatus of classical philosophy

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[17][7], p. 525.

of consciousness allows showing only *the fact that* something is lost when reason is instrumentalised, but not *what* is lost[18].

The two-ontology world Habermas is referring to, is the one in which social reality is included. Of importance now is not only the objective world, but also the relation of a subject with that social world. To act rationally, one has to behave "rightly" with regard to implicit but strongly present norms and rules.

In addition to these two, a three-ontology world also includes the world of subjective experiences. Here we very much deviate from Habermas' frame of reference, in the sense that to us this subjective experience of being touched, which surpasses us, is a prime subjective experience.

Before further elaborating this subject in relation to the three horizons referred to above, an additional conceptual de-linking and re-linking needs to be worked out; this time, the re-linking concerns the need for "being situated in or oriented towards a larger whole".

3.2.2 Being situated, being orientated towards

The phrases "being situated in" and "oriented towards" very often have New Age or conservative connotations suggesting that no more room is left for individual freedom, with people uncritically submitting their will to that of a higher goal of a group, a culture, a nation (nationalism) or a religion (fundamentalism or animism). According to Levinas and Taylor, however, these phrases do not imply uncritically submerging, but rather refer to a position between submergence and detachment. To elucidate what we mean we again refer to Levinas.

Levinas makes clear that, contrary to what may generally be taken for granted, people are never fully at one with themselves but rather split egos. There is on the one hand an acting self and on the other hand a self that is reflecting about that acting. The reflecting can occur simultaneously with the acting. The question Levinas asks himself is whether both the observing self and the acting self are the same. He considers the answer to be positive, since people experience themselves as single united beings. On the other hand, people also experience two different split-up selves. So, whilst we feel very much at one with ourselves, our minds cannot get grip on both the observer and the observed at the same time. Although logically not correct,

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[18] "Die Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft, die den Bedingungen der Subjektphilosophie verhaftet bleibt, denunziert als Makel, was sie in seiner Makelhaftigkeit nicht erklären kann, weil ihr für die Integrität dessen, was durch instrumentelle Vernunft zerstört wird, eine hinreichend geschmeidige Begrifflichkeit fehlt". ([27], p. 522)

for Levinas both contradicting feelings are true feelings.

A similar phenomenon is recognisable in the pain and pleasure referred to earlier in this article. Although mental or physical suffering can take up a considerable amount of conceptual space in any person's life, people never entirely *are* that suffering. Likewise, while enjoyment can reach deep down into all of our fibres, we are not the joy [32].

3.2.3 The ethical horizon, the social-cultural-historical horizon, the physical horizon

In relation to the ethical horizon, the social-cultural-historical horizon and the physical horizon, we will now re-introduce a similar awareness that is transcendental or surpassing yet without total submergence. We very much think that a re-introduction of these horizons may produce a shift at the conceptual level which may have an influence on the way we look at problems on the individual, the societal and the ecological levels. More precisely, there may be an interlaced shift in how we understand and experience the world, and how we understand and experience ourselves.

a. The ethical horizon

The *ethical* horizon is not visible in a one-ontology world[19]. One might wonder whether it is depictable in a two-ontology world, since the norms and rules in this world seem to reside on the conscious-implicit level. The ethical horizon we are referring to is also implicit, but on a different level. Taylor, who worked out this horizon, clearly shows how our identity can be broadened up by recognising that we are embedded in an ethical context.

In the first chapters of his *The Sources of the Self*, Taylor convincingly illustrates how science uses a one-ontology perspective to study the human self, and how the ethical as a guiding principle is thus made a "differend". As he describes, science reduces the human self to the following four points. a. Man is an object of study, to be taken "absolutely" or in its own "objectivity", in the sense that what people "mean" to each other is of no value. b. What counts is what is "there", no matter the interpretations offered by subjects. c. It is believed that the object — the human self — can be grasped in explicit descriptions. d. No reference to its surroundings is necessary to understand what a self is.

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[19]In having an ethical horizon within the potential to be situated in and orientated towards a broader meaningful whole, it should again become clear how interlinked these potentials all are, their division into four potentials being but a theoretical structure to bring important basic experiences back into the conceptual world.

For Taylor, this is not the way to understand a human self, or to attain self-understanding. What identifies us is layered and complex. However, the moral framework we live in is of the greatest importance. It is so important that it would be impossible to step outside its framework, for this would damage us as persons. As Taylor puts it,

> "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. [...] What this brings to light is the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has a meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary [...] We are all framed by what we see as universally valid commitments, and by what we understand as particular identifications. We often declare our identity as defined by only one of these [...] but in fact our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it."([10], p. 27)

In other words, looking for meaning within a framework defines us as human beings. Questions such as "what kind of life is worth living" or "who am I" are very much intrinsically related. These questions take a considerable amount of our lifetime to be answered, a process which is hampered because Western culture tends to pull people away from these existential questions by ignoring their worth. However, any person's identity will conceptually broaden once they have found out which values are more or less stable in their lives and which are of less importance. Knowing our drives tends to make us firmer. Knowing that own ideals for the good correspond with a larger collective project, will widen our identity even further.

Recognising a transcending horizon is different from uncritically following narrow moral laws. Taylor precisely refers to today's shift of such narrow guidelines to fuzzy meanings. To Taylor, it is our inevitable modern condition to search for an adapted individualised meaning of these fuzzy terms, since today such concepts as benevolence only provide open advice, which will need to be revised from case to case. However, Taylor also correctly states that for new, original meanings to be understood, they will always need to be embedded in the (historically) existing range of ideas about it:

> "A human being can always be original, can step beyond the
> limits of thought and vision of contemporaries [...]. But the
> drive to original vision will be hampered; will ultimately be lost
> in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation
> to the language and vision of others."([10], p. 37)

Nowadays, meaning is dependent on our powers of expression. The discovery of the transcendental framework and our awareness of it are interwoven with our capacity to give these hypergoods a place and a new meaning.

Taylor makes in his book another point which is very central to this paper. He makes clear that we cannot be convinced of somebody else's moral values through rational arguments. Instead, such moral values will need to "appeal" in some way, it should "do" something to us, "touch" us before we will consider making them our own and try to live accordingly. However, once we do so, once we are convinced, we will feel as if we have taken a step in the "right" direction[20].

b. The social-cultural-historical horizon

According to the Western Enlightenment worldview, the *social-cultural-historical* horizon is usually depicted as the "objective" tangible community and state we live in. In a one-world ontology, the community or state can then be considered an object which provides facilities people make use of in order to enhance their personal development. A community can also be visualised from within a two-world ontology, in which basic social norms and rules establish our living together. Depending on place and context, people invariably see themselves as belonging to a particular family, social stratum, a group, a culture, or a nation. In the Western world, there was a strong reaction against this perception of belonging, since it was interpreted differently, namely as a bondage to state or church (which it can also be). From within their one or two-ontology Enlightenment framework, people seeing the bondage could not simultaneously see the worth of belonging, which is only clear in a three-ontology world. Hence, the difference with the

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[20]In *The Sources of the Self*, Taylor restricts this orientation to the collective-cultural values that a society has been building up during ages, and that have implicitly but not unconsciously condensed in our minds. Taylor does not go into the pre-reflective as Levinas does. However, we think that a combination of Taylor and Levinas will help us resolve a problem Taylor is faced with. Taylor very much emphasises that the ethical orientation cannot be but on the cultural-collective level, but he implicitly states that they are very good ones. Because of this, he is implicitly judging aspects of other cultural frames of references. It would seem to us an appropriate way out to define some of Western hypergoods as pre-reflective and pre-cultural appeals. Only the responses to them are cultural.

two-ontology world is not visible but conceptual. It has to do with acknowledging the crucial relevance of this socio-spatial room to our self-definition and our vision of the world. The question of "who am I" is inextricably linked up with the question of "where do I belong to".

Its importance can be deeply felt the moment we have to do without all these elements which definitely form our identity, and which we seem to take for granted. A study by the anthropologist Roosens on the Huron Indians in Canada provides insights into its mechanism. Forced to move away from their holy ground, and having lost their common stories and traditions, this tribe created a new myth of origin with specific indications of their descent [37]. This restored to the individual members a common — conceptual — past and identity from which to rebuild their own personal identities. Central to them were not only the here and now societal actuality of rules and norms, of institutional structures and artefacts. Of even more significance were the *meaning* these elements had for them on a broad, conceptual horizontal level, to which they could feel they belonged as part of a continuation of past, present and future[21].

Our point is that only the very moment we discover this attachment conceptually, we can start to experience its basic essential and existentialistic worth. Discovering this attachment *is* the experience of a transcendental reality, of which we are a part and which surpasses us. Again, attachment and merging are two different things. If any individual's identity merges with that of the group to the extent of wholly coinciding with it, the result will be an intolerant "we-perspective", which is clear today in growing Islamitic and Bushean fundamentalism. However, the excesses of fundamentalism and nationalism should not be used as a reason for making a "différend" of these feelings of attachment, and being touched, for it is these feelings and their implicit and explicit articulations that enable social commitment. People will be much more eager to commit themselves to social ends when they are able to partially identify in a positive way.

c. The physcial horizon

The third horizon is the *physical* horizon. In a one-ontology world, this hori-

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[21]It would be interesting to compare our ideas with the political-philosophical discussion on citizenship between the communitarist and the liberals, as described with great nuance by Kymlicka. As Kymlicka indicates, we ought to have a richer and at the same time more subtle understanding of the practice of citizenship. What the state needs of its citizens cannot be exacted from them. Commitment of citizens should be voluntary. A commitment on this basis precisely seems to be possible when citizens can conceptually again recognise a three-ontology world, which in fact they already experience. See [16], p. 284.

zon totally overlaps with nature. As we have said, in the Western worldview, people have learned conceptually to perceive nature as mere disenchanted material. The world supposedly is no more than a tangible reality in the here and now, which we can study objectively. The one-world ontology leaves conceptually little space for a mental image or articulation of nature from the perspective of a three-world ontology. It is very difficult to articulate it that way in our language, since its connotations are rather negative, as we have seen. Yet, at the practical level, all people seem to have at least some experiences which they can only express within a three-world ontology. Such experiences very often concern esthetical experiences in nature, for instance when people are awe-struck by the force of nature, or on the contrary by the silence and harmony pervading a particular panoramic view. These "being touched by nature" experiences make us "experience" and "know" that nature is more than the tangible, that nature surpasses us. We "realise" its greatness because of its beauty, and its destructive and creative powers. We can feel these powers in us. However, as Levinas explained, as humans, we do not fuse with ourselves, with our pains, with our pleasure. We remain autonomous beings while having an experience of uniting. A similar process occurs when we are in nature. In nature, at such moments of linkedness we feel that we are receiving energy and strength, without however fusing.

As is the case with the two previous horizons, to be considered a horizon and not merely outer tangible here and now reality, these experiences of "being touched" should conceptually receive full articulation in the Western worldview. They are basic, not only for the self to understand that it is part of this larger world, but also in order to create potential commitment. If people seem to care more for the things of which they consider themselves a part, it is paramount to at least recognise this feeling in its stripped, de-associated way.

So, central to the recognition of the ethical, the social-cultural and the physical horizons is the "being touched" experience as a pre-historical, pre-cultural and pre-conscious event. Being touched is an immediate experience, something we receive in the immediate present. The being touched awareness triggers the potential to be situated in and oriented towards a broader whole, a potential which also encourages the ethical in us. The very moment one feels attached to society or nature by way of recognising its surpassing value and by acknowledging the meaning it can have for one, a latent commitment will be generated. We will be more inclined to care for something when we feel attached to it. Moreover, because of this being touched, life itself can be conceived of as "broader". The potential to be situated, which is interlaced with the possibility to orient oneself towards something, can make

one's life more meaningful, because one can sense an additional depth. Life does not begin and end by oneself, but represents a much broader frame of reference of which one conceptually feels a part. It may also lead to feeling closer to oneself[22].

However, as we have said, because of the complex fusing of the rational potential and the potential for self-expression with egocentrism and instrumentalism, one is pulled towards perceiving society and nature as there for one's use, and ethics as only residing in oneself. The essential meaning of feelings of linkedness cannot be uttered in our worldview. They still are a "différend". Because of this gap between conceptual voicing and feelings, and because of the dominance of the power to express, we might tend to implicitly rate these experiences as of low importance, and hence as "negligible". In doing so, we again nip both the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a larger meaningful whole in the bud.

As repeatedly stated, what we have tried to achieve in bringing back these horizons to the conceptual worldview is to deliver some extra elements on the level of deliberation, so as to enable people to make appropriate autonomous choices. People always take decisions within a frame of reference. They never do so in a frame-less context. We consider the existing frame of reference too narrow, because of which it even does not accord with some of our pre-reflective "experiences".

3.2.4 Developing the potential to be situated in a larger whole

In this last part we will try to make clear that people, whilst this potential to be situated in and oriented toward a broader meaningful whole has not yet been acknowledged on a conceptual level, seem to be capable of developing this potential anyhow. Important ways in which they succeed in this, are precisely by developing their rational potential (for example, by studying) and their potential for self-expression (for instance, by practising art and music). It links people with themselves and a broader meaningful whole. However, not all people arrive at doing so. If they are unsuccessful in finding means on their own, people may be inclined to look for compensation to the

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[22]We realise that this kind of short phrasings may lead to a miscomprehension of what we mean. It may suggest a harmony model. We do not intend to say that because of this potential the self will become "at one" with itself. We rather tend to support the conception that a self is an ever changing entity; that is why we introduce the potentiality idea. Further research still needs to be done as to how a changed self-understanding as we see it, relates to the philosophical conception of an identity, expressed by authors such as David Lewis, Robert Nozick or Derek Parfit, see for instance [38]; or more existentialist-minded authors such as J. Golomb [39].

ideology of neo-liberal economy, combined with the (utilitarian) ideology of free will and autonomy, which — in an awkward way — conceptually is not acknowledged as serving such a function[23].

The result may be only a small opportunity for developing the potential to be situated, which in itself may be enough. However, some people may become aware of a form of alienation. Three concrete examples may clarify what we mean, which in reality of course are not so strictly demarcated.

a. Some people are appealed by the economic/free will discourse and really feel good the moment they can reach its goals. Their aspiration to be situated is then satisfied by way of ego-centrality, in which having an opinion, or making choices of one's own is what is meaningful. Their aspiration can also be fulfilled when they feel they are somebody because of their economic prestige and social status making them feel socially embedded. Although people may perceive themselves as "happy" in these circumstances, we still consider this a limited form of happiness, which could be broadened if only they realised that for genuine self-realisation the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a meaningful larger whole, can be more fundamentally expressed.

b. If people are unable to reach the desired goals referred to above, they may seek to compensate this by riding someone else's status, identifying with it and thinking positively of oneself by being friends with that other person or by living strictly according to norms and values of a society or subgroup; or again, by embarking on an ongoing competition with the neighbours. Ms Bouquet, the protagonist from the English series "Keeping up appearances" may serve as a striking example of such dwarf forms of being situated in a larger whole.

c. There may be people who take the above Enlightenment ideas to be implicitly true and try to adhere to them, but without identifying with them, and also without either knowing or being appealed by alternatives. Such people feel a genuine aspiration to be situated in a larger meaningful whole, but have no way of expressing it within the existing framework. They may live with that uneasy feeling that there is more to life, without being able to express their fundamental desire. As psychologist Cushman states: "The self seeks the experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation

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[23]The Belgian philosopher Ignaas Devisch maybe too firmly states that we are not only "bildet" ; we are formed in a perfidious way. Not only does the hegemonic ideology deny its own non-neutral state; argumentatively it is made impossible to question the ideology, since in doing so, it is said that one is harming the "public reasonability" [40].

of its era "[41]. Or as Kanner and Gomes put it: "American children come to internalise the messages they see in the media and in society at large. They learn to substitute what they are told to want — mounds of material possession — for what they truly want. By the time they reach adulthood, their authentic feelings are so well buried that they have only the vaguest sense that "something" is missing. Having ignored their genuine needs for so long, they feel empty "[42]. A feeling of alienation may be the result.

4 Epilogue

This article set out by making clear that people in the Western world build their self-understanding on a set of assumptions, which we defined as two grounding potentials, the potential to be rational and the potential for self-expression. In the first part we traced their origin and development. We pointed out that, because of their potential structure, their articulation may change. We tried to demonstrate how, unintentionally and because of a clustering of meanings, their development indeed tends to be twisted. We interrelated that twisting with problems on the individual, societal and environmental levels.

In a second part, we introduced two more grounding potentials which in the Western worldview are "le différend" in conceptual terms, in order to broaden our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. Making these potentialities explicitly visible can change the perspective of how to think and express oneself as a human being. People might visualise more clearly what it means to be ethical and being situated in a larger whole, and the importance it has for self-realisation. From within this context, people can still make their *own* deliberations, but the scope of available options will be enlarged, so to speak. Instead of a range of conceptual messages largely inciting one to choose for oneself first, the widened scope includes the importance of fellow citizens and the relation with the world as factors to be accounted for in striving to become a truly human being. As a result, deliberations may still tilt towards choosing for oneself first — which in itself is not negative — but because of other prospectives having come into the conceptual fore, the degree in which this will happen is quite likely to diminish.

In order not to interfere on the personal level we have tried — as much as possible — to introduce these two potentialities and the associated horizons in their naked, non-articulated state. However, any expression in language irrevocably implies articulating and leading the mind in certain conceptual

directions. Yet, while we hope that the concepts used may indeed lead to a conceptual recognition of this potential, we equally hope that at the same time they will leave ample space for new interpretations.

In this paper, the descriptions of the ethical potential and the potential to be situated in a larger meaningful whole are only at a preliminary stage. Articulations require considerable fine-tuning, while concepts should be more clearly defined and deepened out. This is envisaged for the near future. Any suggestions will be much appreciated.

Acknowledgments

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