MODERN MAN IN SEARCH OF MEANING

The Quest for Significance in a World of Disenchanted Enchantment

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the impact of the force of modernisation on man's ability to conceive of the world as a meaningful whole. Even though modernisation is a tremendously energising and progressive force that transformed European society throughout the modern era, many thinkers have also addressed the 'dark side' of modernisation that can be found in its disenchanting, disruptive, and disembedding character. This thesis, therefore, explores how the challenge of a meaningful order can still be met by modern man in light of this uprooting character. As developed in this thesis, the quest for meaning starts with the realisation that despite the disenchantment of the world, moderns still find themselves in a condition of disenchanted enchantment, where meaning and significance can be found in existence through attunement and ontological involvement. This can only be achieved through the insight that man is fallible and finite, and therefore in dire need of an embedding horizon, found in structures of tradition, myth, and narrative. To this end, modern man needs a dialectical perspective that does not deny the energising and progressive force of modernisation nor refuses to acknowledge man's fundamental need for a horizon of meaning that provides embeddedness in the uprooting chaos of modern existence.

Keywords: Modernity, (Dis)enchantment, Meaning, Hermeneutics, Embeddedness

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most influential perspectives on reality that one can find in the twenty-first century world has found its origin in the mixture of political, social, intellectual, economic, and technological developments that have unfolded and merged synergistically throughout the period most commonly denominated as 'modernity'. And indeed, it seems like the underlying process of modernisation, as a sweeping force, has lifted out Western man from his predicament of dependence, and put him at the centre of the universe. From the dawn of modernity onwards, no longer he would have to rely on superstitious narratives and mythological explanations of the world, as he unmasked their illusionary character through his newly discovered capacities for scientific inquiry, opening up the way of relating to the world as a set of neutral objects awaiting manipulation to achieve material progress.

Modern man, looking down on his predecessors, has finally come to see himself as the culmination of history, as he traded the primitive for the developed, the violent for the just, the tribe for the state, myth for reason, and suppression for freedom. Abandoning traditional forms of life and their perspective on the world as a coherently meaningful order which embeds man in existence, he has come to embrace himself as the neutral and autonomous force of manipulation that, guided by optimistic reason and his belief in scientific explicability and technological manipulability, has the disposition to achieve infinite progress. Accordingly, the world itself, or so it seemed, was rid of its magical and spiritual order, and subsequently became the stage for human manipulation and progress, a stage existing of neutral, value-free objects; the raw material for the technological (re)construction of the world. Thus, man, instead of God, declared himself as creator of himself, his surroundings, and history itself.

The force of modernisation, therefore, constitutes a radical rupture in the condition of social existence. Whereas in the pre-modern world, human life and its purpose and meaning were deeply embedded in the inherent order of the cosmos, the force of modernisation constitutes a dynamic and disruptive continuity of transformation on the level of the self, the world, as well as the way of relating to the world. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the legacy of modern thought is still extremely visible, as modern man remains faithful to the secular vision of the limitless human drive towards economic growth, scientific innovation, and human progress that we find in modernity. Through the advancement of information and communication technologies in the last decades, an informatisation of the world picture has established itself, analogous to the preceding mechanisation of the world picture. This new

way of relating to the world and to humanity, deeply moulded by a technological and informational approach, has resulted in the current habitus of modern man: "Technopolis" (Sheikh, 2017). The process of informatisation of the world view implies that the world is seen as operating under rules and algorithms of information processing, that can be synthesised, programmed, and manipulated (de Mul, 1999). This way of relating to reality therefore goes hand in hand with the project that modernisation has been from the outset: *the mastery and control of every aspect of nature and human fate.*

Modern man indeed has risen out of its pre-modern predicament through the autonomous use of reason, followed by the release from his "selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit" (Kant, 1784), putting him at the centre of his own universe. The modern attitude, that we can still identify in the twenty-first century informatised world, was thus kickstarted by the interference from God's goodness to God's nonexistence: Human beings must make reality themselves *ex nihilo*, since, after Nietzsche's famous declaration, God is a *Deus Emeritus*. This reinforces the increasingly widespread idea of *makeability* which entails that humans make everything; from themselves to their own fate. As the creeds of technological fundamentalists reveal, the informational approach to reality is a means to the appropriation of this idea. Indeed, the increasing scientific understanding of the world and the development of technology have contributed to man's control over the forces of nature, but at the same time this official defatalisation carries with it a *refatalisation*, since human beings, confronted with the inevitability of their finitude, fallibility, and lack of omnipotence, have no disposition over the consequences of their actions. Ironically, this refatalisation is most clearly visible in the realm of technology, where man thought he could eradicate fate forever. Every time a new technology is introduced, man is at the same time confronted with unforeseen consequences ranging from severe privacy issues, to climate change, to the spread of inequality. Man, thus imitates divine powers by rebuilding the earth and improving on nature with techno-scientific advancements, but the fundamental and inescapable shortness of life, *vita brevis*, leads to the fact that no human being has the time in which to distance itself from the past and its surroundings, and examine the 'true' and absolute reality that underlies human existence.

There is, however, a more profound tragic issue at hand in the modern world besides its refatalisation, since through striving for the complete domestication of fate and control of nature modern man has *widened* the gap between himself and the world that he inhabits, as affirmed by Horkheimer & Adorno: "Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" (1947, p. 6). Thus, the modern attitude

based on the Cartesian dream has not fully resulted in the defatalisation of life and the domestication of fate, but at the same time man *has become detached and disembedded from his surroundings*. Subsequently, the collapse of the relevance and authority of traditional and mythological explanations of the world that modern man claims to have surpassed, has resulted in the crumbling of the structures that imbue life with meaning and purpose. Yet, man as fallible and finite being, lacking omnipotence, needs these structures to allow him to cope with his inescapably tragic existence. Nietzsche's prophecy of nihilism and totalitarianism as consequences of the destruction of these structures of meaning – symbolically expressed with 'the death of God' – has unfolded itself with astonishing accuracy.

While the pre-modern individual views his surroundings as things to accept, comprehend, and appreciate, the modern individual increasingly takes a manipulative stance of control and utilisation, causing the aforementioned estrangement that Horkheimer & Adorno address. The modern way of relating to the world, therefore, has to a certain extent rid the world of spirits and magic, as, through the processes of modernisation – from rationalisation to secularisation – the world becomes increasingly explainable, laying a foundation for the secular vision of progress through increased scientific explicability and technological manipulability. Whereas in an enchanted world, meaning can be derived from the inherently meaningful and teleological order of nature and the cosmos itself, in the modern, *dis*enchanted world sources of meaning become less palpable.

The disenchantment of the world brought with it a 'buffered' conception of the self, based on a clear dichotomy between self and world. The buffered self, as opposed to the 'porous' self that finds itself in an enchanted world, can disengage from whatever is outside the mind (Taylor, 2007, p. 38). According to Taylor, the most extreme view of disenchantment can be found in the loss of the pre-modern idea of a meaningful cosmic order and its replacement with a conception of the universe as meaningless, mechanistic, and value-free. This 'projective' view is predicated on the Enlightenment-inspired assertion that qualities and values are epiphenomenal subjective illusions that we impose upon a value-neutral, mechanistic universe. Meaning and significance, in this paradigm, therefore become easily reduced to 'choices' or maintained illusions, discarding their validity as a moral horizon that guides human action. In this frame of immanence that man has created by rejecting the transcendent, everything significant becomes of this world, explicable in its own terms. However, for human agents to derive deep meaning from lived-experience and the world around them, they need a qualitative

discrimination of the incomparably higher, of something outside of themselves that they come to signify.

The sheer amount of self-help books, the increasing amounts of burn-outs among young individuals, and the renewed search for spirituality in yoga and mindfulness in the twenty-first century Western world are a few indications of the sense of absence of meaning and purpose in modern times. These phenomena are also discussed by psychiatrist Dirk de Wachter, author of *Borderline Times* (2011), who attributes the dramatic rise in burn-outs and depressions among young individuals to the difficulty of finding meaningful and purposeful existence in the chaos of the modern world. As will be argued in this thesis, the upsurge of the problem of meaning finds its origin in the various processes that went together with modernisation, from disenchantment to secularisation, that made it increasingly difficult for modern man to conceive meaningfully of himself and his place in the world. The question at hand in this thesis therefore involves how the challenge of creating a meaningful order can still be met in light of the disruptive and disenchanting processes of modernisation that unfold themselves with an exponential pace. Central to this question is the inquiry how a re-evaluation of the modern individual and his relation to the world can be accounted for, in order to give the modern, disembedded individual a meaningful place in life again. This does not include a reversal of the disenchantment process, nor a nostalgic account of pre-modern societies, but rather an investigation of an embedded structure of meaning that takes into account the aforementioned unofficial refatalisation of human life as well as the inevitabilities of its condition.

As Haroon Sheikh (2017) explains, old traditions remain to play an important role in modernity through the persistence of an inner ethos, an inner way of relating to the world. Sheikh is aligned with the German philosopher Odo Marquard, who emphasises the importance of myth, narrative, and tradition in coping with life: *Narrare necesse est!* The modern disenchanted worldview may have increased our knowledge of the world around us, but as Marquard maintains, stories or myths are necessary in helping us to live with these truths, which means that *we never have left myth behind us*: "das Wissen ist nicht das Grab, sondern das Startloch der Mythologie" (1981, p. 95). Modern man should thus come to see that the march of human thought towards a techno-scientific way of relating to the world cannot *by itself* bring about a meaningful moral and ethical existence. Therefore, the predominant perspective on traditional mythological and religious presuppositions and conceptions of life as archaic and superstitious should be overcome. This, furthermore, requires the insight that myth and enchantment are not indications of something untrue, but

rather something that has a narrative structure and is predicated on presumptions that find their roots beyond the empirical and scientifically accountable.

To gain deeper insight in the structures that have the potential of embedding the modern individual, a philosophical hermeneutic account will be developed, which is grounded in ontological involvement. This account demonstrates that it is only possible to conceive of the world meaningfully while being in the world: "only from within nature is it possible to conceive of nature; and only from within being is it possible to conceive of being" (Schuback, 2011). This, therefore, means that it is impossible to conceive of the world around us from an 'objective' position, free from already existing meaning from which to conceive of meaning. Tradition, myth, and narrative, as hermeneutics proposes, are structures of ontological involvement in the sense of dwelling in a world of meaning. Conceiving of the world from the premise of a subject-object distinction — a perspective that is advanced through modernisation — can therefore never be *sufficient* by itself in order to appreciate the world as a meaningful whole. Although hermeneutics might have lost its religious connotation, this thesis will emphasise the renewed relevance of philosophical hermeneutics for discovering what constitutes the meaningful amidst the chaos of modern times.

This thesis, therefore, is an exploration of the path towards finding an embedding counterforce against the disembedding character of the processes of modernisation by investigating the imperative role of tradition, myth, and narrative in the creation of a meaningful order for individuals amidst the chaos of modern life. This involves on one hand an acknowledgement of the energising force of modernity and its ideal of human and material progress, but on the other hand a deep understanding of the vitality and relevance of the old traditional, mythological, and religious structures in interpreting the world as meaningful. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to shed new light on the continuous *dialectical* process with tradition and modernising forces at its basis. The research question that guides this thesis, therefore, is the following: How can the challenge of creating a meaningful order be met in light of the disruptive and disenchanting forces of modernisation?

To this end, the structure is built up of three parts. In part one, a descriptive account will be provided of the fundamental ideas and historical processes that underlie the secular-scientific vision of progress that can be found at the core of modern thought. Starting with Bacon and Descartes, the radically transformative and energising historical processes of change that were brought about from the dawn of modernity will be accounted for to serve as a basis

for the normative analysis developed in part two. In the second part, subsequently, an analysis will be put forward that discusses the discontents that can be found in the tragedy of modern life. This analysis, therefore, will have a focus on the 'dark side' of modernisation, that uproots modern man and disembeds him from his horizon of meaning and significance, leading to a profound problem of meaninglessness. To emphasise, this section necessarily has a dark tone that may not do justice to the positive and energising side of the force of modernisation. Yet, this analysis is necessary to gain deeper understanding of the far-reaching consequences of modernisation. Bearing these consequences in mind, forms an account of how the quest for creating a meaningful order can still be met in light of the uprooting and disembedding character of modernisation. This account involves a phenomenological and hermeneutic exploration of the structures that have the potential of embedding the individual, thereby providing a counterforce against the disembedding that characterises modernisation. Lastly, in the conclusion the main results of this investigation will be summed up and synergised, to gain understanding of how modern man, whilst undeniably affected by the disenchanting force of modernisation, may still embark on the quest of meaning that has the potential of imbuing his life with relevance and purpose.

PART ONE

MODERNITY AND THE FORCE OF MODERNISATION

At the heart of modernity stands the project of mastering and controlling every aspect of nature and human fate, the vision of unlocking the secrets of life and releasing oneself from the shackles of nature that prevent human flourishing and victory. This modern attitude of relating to the world at least in some facets differs fundamentally from the preceding tragic and Christian attitudes, since "it does not aim at accepting fate, but rather firmly defends itself against it" (De Mul, 2014, p. 17). Accordingly, man imitates divine powers by rebuilding the earth and improving on nature in the absence of God. Modernity thus has a visionary character of the future of humanity, imbued with rational optimism based on faith in the scientific explicability and technological[1] manipulability of the world.

Modernity can therefore also be seen as a radical rupture in the condition of social existence of past forms of human experience (Shiliam, 2017). The concept of modernity, however, is not unproblematic and unambiguous, since it is a vastly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon which has come to signify a whole range of interrelated political, social, intellectual, economic, technological, and psychological aspects which merged synergistically in the West between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Saler, 2006, p. 694). In the scope of this thesis, however, modernity will primarily be approached from a philosophical perspective that takes the modern way of relating to the world – presupposed by conceptions of the world and the self – as its level of analysis.

Modernisation, as distinct from modernity, is generally thought to be the continual, non-linear transitional process that moves from a pre-modern or traditional society to a modern one, changing the world and its peoples with ever-increasing pace. It is therefore appropriate to see modernisation as force, a disruptive force that changes everything in its way. That science and technology are central to these developments comes to no surprise, since he who uncovers the universal laws of nature cannot only explain the world around him, but he can also control the events that take place in this environment.

To identify the fundamental ideas and historical roots of this secular-scientific vision of progress that finds its origin in the rise of modernity in the West, this chapter will cover the intellectual origins of this force of modernisation.[2] Modernisation as singular force can generally be seen as constituted in three domains: the self, the world, and the way in which

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[1] The term 'technological', here, refers to a technical (*techne*) way of relating to the world, rather than specific technologies themselves.

[2] Due to the complex nature of modernity and its rapid developments, this account will necessarily be seriously incomplete, yet provide insight in the historical processes underlying modernisation.

the self relates to the world (Sheikh, 2017, p. 187). This chapter therefore analyses these domains respectively, in light of the radically transformative historical processes of change that were brought about from the dawn of modernity.

1.1 SAPERE AUDE: IMMATURITY OVERCOME

1.1.1 Scientific Revolution

Even though there is no consensus on whether the rapid scientific developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should be accounted for as revolutionary[3], they have laid the rational and mathematical foundation for what would become modern science. The novel explanation and method of interpretation of nature and reality that developed throughout these centuries stood in sharp contrast with mythological and pre-modern explanations of reality, and as modern science progressed it started challenging and overturning many of the traditionally held assumptions. At the basis of this modern way of relating to the world was the vision that disinterested science could arrive at objective knowledge that would allow mankind to understand and improve the world. The origins of this novel scientific attitude can be traced back to new philosophical perspectives and scientific methods, such as the empiricism of Bacon and the rationalism of Descartes.

The disruptive nature of this new way of relating to the world was articulated by Francis Bacon, who proposed at the end of the sixteenth century that all past beliefs should be rejected if they were not grounded in fact or reason. Subsequently, Bacon condemned philosophy in his time for relying too much on the prejudiced and biased heritage of ancient philosophy. For discovering the real truth, Bacon maintained that science and mathematics have to play a central role in overcoming bias and 'truth' based on experience. Fundamental to the progress of the scientific discovery of this truth, according to Bacon, was the method of induction, which he described as a machine in *The Great Instauration*: "I have provided the machine, but the stuff must be gathered from the facts of nature" (Bacon, 1620). In other words, Bacon laid the methodological foundation for empirical observation and inductive interferences from such observation.

Bacon's philosophy was essentially utopian in the sense that it contained the idea that the progress of science would bring progress in general (Agassi, 2013). Scientific and practical

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[3] Steven Shapin (1996), for example, contests the claim that there was a single, coherent development that could be called the Scientific Revolution.

knowledge, bringing forth new technical inventions and mechanical discoveries, is the force that drives history towards progress. This progress is achieved by cooperation of learned individuals, contributing to the development of the arts and sciences as well as progress in general, and lies at the hearth of Bacon's philosophy. As Gaukroger (2004, p. 225) writes, Bacon began the transformation of the philosopher into what, in the nineteenth century would become the scientist; someone concerned with factual rather than speculative issues. This Baconian vision of science and progress, as we will later see, would become deeply implicated in the Enlightenment advocacy of a scientific, rather than experience-based, engagement with the world.[4]

Like Bacon, René Descartes was highly sceptical of every form of traditional assumptions about reality and truth, but perhaps in an even more fundamental manner. Whereas some call Descartes the father of modernity, Kenny (2010, p. 532) conceives of Descartes' position in the history of philosophy as the waist of an hourglass; as the sand in the upper chamber reaches the lower chamber only through a slender passage, so too pre-modern ideas have reached the modern world through the narrow filter of the compressing genius of Descartes. The aforementioned narrow filter is constituted by Descartes' conviction that to prevent being caught up in falsehood, the philosopher must radically doubt whatever can be doubted; from traditional views of the world to one's own senses. This sceptical stance resulted in Descartes' famous first principle, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), which he describes as the "first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way" (1647/2018, p. 1:7). The fact that Descartes doubts everything, but at the same time cannot doubt the fact that he doubts, that he thinks, implicitly means that man himself can be the fundament of his own rational thought. Subsequently, this first principle laid the foundation of Descartes' project of rebuilding the house of knowledge entirely.

Descartes, thus, can be seen as the first philosopher as total innovator; setting out to find a rational basis from which to build up the truth about man and his universe. The foundation of this development is rationalism; the view that reason is our ultimate guarantee of knowledge about reality (Scruton, 1995, p. 41). As the human senses are intrinsically unreliable in discerning the reality of the physical world, rational reflection, rather than empirical observation, finds the key to 'objective' knowledge. Descartes, therefore, also offered a new

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[4] As Gaukroger (2004, p. 91) states, the atheism that characterised the Enlightenment was absent in Bacon's thought and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in general; in many respects natural philosophy was even more caught up with religious questions than mediaeval thought.

vision of the natural world, which from his time on would be seen as a world of matter, possessing a few fundamental properties that interact according to universal laws of nature. The most fundamental legacy of Descartes in Western thought, however, may be the radical and growing separation of thought and the physical world, of human subject and natural object (Störig, 2017, p. 346). This way of relating to the objective world would spread in the seventeenth century, progressing the idea of science as a reliable product of disinterested inquiry that results in knowledge allowing mankind to flourish and improve on itself.

1.1.2 The *Philosophes* and Tradition

As Scruton (1995, p. 46) writes, most of the *philosophes* during the French Enlightenment had their intellectual roots in Cartesian scepticism. However, this Cartesian scepticism became separated from the intellectual accomplishment of the metaphysics which stemmed from it, and slowly it started becoming a literary device that spurred an increasingly detached attitude of rational unbelief.

Whereas before 1650 Western civilisation was based on a widely shared rigid core of faith, tradition, and authority, after 1650 this deeply rooted framework started to crumble under pressure of philosophical reason, partly inspired by the aforementioned developments which may be attributed to the scientific revolution (Israel, 2001). Although Bacon and Descartes both remained faithful to their religions, during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, frictions started to occur between the progressive spirit of rationalisation and secularisation on the one hand, and the traditional religious authorities on the other hand. During the Early Enlightenment an immense reverence for science and mathematical logic came up, and slowly but surely all intellectual heritage from the past, from commonly held assumptions about reality to the veracity of religion and revelation, was sceptically approached and openly challenged. Religious tyranny and political despotism were regarded as the cause and effect of the miserable darkness of the medieval times, and the only way out of this vicious circle was to enlighten mankind and embrace the spirit of progress through rationalisation and secularisation.

Especially in eighteenth-century France[5], the church was frequently attacked with strong words, such as Voltaire's famous "écraser l'infâme", which translates as "crush the infamous one" (1763/2000, p. xv). The superstition and moral decadence that were present in medieval

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[5] As Israel (2001, p. 6) explains, most accounts of the European Enlightenment concentrate on developments in France and England, but in fact the intellectual developments of this age were extremely wide-ranging, and never confined to one or two regions.

times also became weapons in the philosophes attack on all that was affiliated to tradition or religion; dynamite was placed under the religious myths, supposedly replacing them with true scientific knowledge grounded in facts. Voltaire stated that two essential elements lacked in the 'dark times' of the preceding ages: reason and courage (Logan, 1972, p. 87).

The *philosophes*, including Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, among others, regarded it as their duty to change the traditional political system and "to bring it in conformity with reason" (Dupré, 2004, p. 181), to release man from the burden of self-incurred immaturity. The only way to release man from this burden is to teach him to think for himself, and not to blindly follow claims by the old authorities and institutions – church and state – that had prescribed human behaviour and thought for centuries. As Porter (1990) notes, the *philosophes* were not men in ivory towers, but rather men of the world, leading a life as journalist or activist, trampling on prejudice, tradition, universal consent, authority; all that enslaves most minds.

1.1.3   The Modern Self

The transformation of the intellectual landscape in many European countries throughout these centuries culminated in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, an important transformation that was later described by Immanuel Kant as "der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit" (Kant, 1784). Here, *Unmündigkeit* refers to man's immaturity through his inability of understanding the world without the guidance of another, and this immaturity is *selbstverschuldet*, since its direct cause is not a lack of intelligence, but rather a self-incurred absence of courage and willpower. The maxim of the Enlightenment can thus be indicated as '*Sapere Aude*' ('dare to know'), a secular commandment to have the courage to take the leap forward, propelled by the advancement of knowledge and the understanding of nature, leading to a process of mental liberation.

Accompanied by a rise of literacy and the spread of publishing, the social force of independent intellectuals started taking hold of a broader public. Throughout eighteenth-century Europe, French salons, English coffee houses, and German *Tischgesellschafte* became the centres of the modernising force, propelled by Enlightenment thought. As Habermas explains in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991), in these places citizens gathered to listen to music and discuss politics and literature, signifying the rise of the public sphere; a domain based on an idea of public reason unhampered by external constraint or governance. This public sphere became the centre of translating individual experience into public awareness, transforming the modern individual into a conscious being in society who

relies on first-hand experience rather than second-hand authority. Subsequently, the public sphere can be seen as the pre-condition of the rise of the modern democratic society. At the level of the individual, the modern developments have thus transformed the self from one who must humbly accept his fate, to one who increasingly feels that he has the disposition to meet the challenges of life by actively taking control of life – private and public – itself. Subsequently, the deeply engrained idea of human nature as innately sinful is also discarded through this transformation, and evolves into the vision that love, desire, pride, and ambition are not evil forces, but rather forces that, guided by enlightened reason, can essentially achieve mastery and advancement of one's life.

This progressive view of modern man as master of his own life was predicated on the *neutralisation* of human nature itself. Following Locke's ideas as expounded in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* published in the late seventeenth century, a different view of human nature came to the fore; one that denied any innate principles in the mind, whether speculative or practical (Kenny, 2010, p. 539). The human mind was thus conceived of as a *tabula rasa*, a "white paper void of all characters, without any ideas" (Locke, 1690/2014, p. 95) that absorbs and accumulates data through the senses, which is subsequently shaped into ideas.

Man, thus, became conceived of as the master of his own ideas, through his capacities and the learning process that results in knowledge. As Porter writes, "engaged…in a constant dialectical interplay with his fellows and environment, man was ever evolving to meet the challenges of a world he was continually changing" (1990, p. 20). Accordingly, the idea of progress is deeply imbued in this modern conception of human nature, since the simple ideas derived from sensation and reflection, can be combined into complex ideas: "the mind has great power in varying and multiplying the objects of its thoughts, infinitely beyond what sensation or reflection furnished it with" (Locke, 1690/2014, p. 155).

The modern neutralisation of human nature as described in the previous section eradicates the idea of an inherently, or in Lockean terms innately, pre-determined path that one *ought to* follow in life, based on a teleologically meaningful order of things. As Porter (1990) notes, the Enlightenment faith in the secular perfectibility of man and the human capacity for progressiveness hinged upon the assumption that much of mankind had already risen from 'savagery' to 'civilisation', from 'rudeness' to 'refinement'. Subsequently, the fundamentalist Christian theologies that had traditionally characterised man as fallen and sinful, and therefore

in dire need of salvation, were dismissed as unscientific and without foundation, and replaced by the conviction that passions and desires could serve as aids to human advancement[6]. Instead of the humble acceptance of a divine plan, man is therefore forced to embrace a heroic attitude as creator of his own life. Baudelaire (1964/2010) calls this attitude *dandysme*; it describes the modern man who does not go off to discover himself, but who tries to invent himself. As Foucault writes accordingly: "modernity does not liberate man in his own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (1984, p. 39).

Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 14) also sees the development of this attitude in modernity, as the question of 'How shall I live?' in the post-traditional order of modernity is not answered by church or state, pope or king, but has to be answered by the individual himself in day-to-day decisions about how to behave or what to wear. Giddens calls this modern attitude *reflexivity*, since the life of the modern individual is reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about the possible ways of life. The modern conception of the self, thus, takes the self to be a neutral force of manipulation of its own life, meeting the challenges of life by actively and autonomously shaping life itself. As we will see in the next section, this force of manipulation is not only directed to the neutral slate that the self has become, but also its background, the world itself that is neutralised by the force of modernity.

1.2 THE MODERN WORLD

Parallel to the neutralisation of the modern individual as tabula rasa, in modernity we can find a neutralisation of the world itself. Whereas in pre-modern times, the individual was embedded in a world that was inherently meaningful, through the force of modernisation the world increasingly becomes perceived as being a neutral background of independently existing, value-free objects, "that can be used as the raw material for the technological (re)construction of a world according mankind's own views" (Jochemsen, 2015, p. 342). Thus, "as time and space are emptied, the world is neutralized and loses its inherent order" (Sheikh, 2017, p. 175).

1.2.1 Natural World as Neutral Background

The relation between the modern world as a neutral background of human endeavours, not containing any inherent meaning or *telos* itself, can be characterised by the attitude of

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[6] As articulated in the writings of, among others, Adam Smith and Mandeville, who both emphasise that self-interest of the individual can benefit society as a whole.

manipulation[7]. Whereas pre-modern individuals viewed their environment as something that they had to accept, comprehend, appreciate, or admire, because it was divine in creation and purpose, modern man breaks with this mythological view and views his environment as something that can be understood, controlled, utilized, and manipulated (Jochemsen, 2015, p. 342). Peter Sloterdijk (2015) patently describes this way of thinking as a kind of 'backdrop ontology' in which man becomes the centre on stage, situated before the backdrop of a mountain or nature which merely serves as the inoperative scenery behind human operations. The manipulative character of relating to the world as the stage and unrestrained resource-fund for man's cultural-historical plays is firmly intertwined with the view of the natural world as a neutral background, an idea that has become increasingly dominant from the seventeenth century onwards.

The first expressions of the natural world as neutral aggregate of objects, in which subjects, that is, human beings, are situated, can be found in the writings of Hobbes (Sheikh, 2017, p. 179). In the seventeenth century, Hobbes took on the project of establishing the principles underlying all accounts of reality, constituting a 'first philosophy' (Dungey, 2008). Therefore, as Peters (1956, p. 76) maintains, Hobbes is to be regarded as the metaphysician of the new scientific movement that we have identified in the previous sections. The principles that Hobbes identifies are found in the physical and mechanical concepts of body, extension, and motion (Dungey, 2008). Even though we may not come to absolutely grasp reality, Hobbes, as materialist, believes that entities exist in 'objective reality', independent of human thought or language.

This materialistic outlook on the world, which constitutes the idea that the world is indeed a neutral aggregate of objects with certain objective characteristics, leads Hobbes to reject the tradition of philosophical thought which had theretofore still held that good and evil, as well as a meaningful (teleological) order, could be found in the world itself: "there is no such *finis ultimus*, (utmost aim,) nor *summum bonum*, (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers" (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 65). Through the forces of modernisation, thus, nature has become the raw material that man manipulated and possesses, through the modern scientific unravelling of the secrets that were theretofore only reserved to the omnipotence of God's wisdom.

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[7] Here, manipulation does not necessarily bear the negative connotation it is often associated with. Rather, it is merely an attitude of handling and managing the world in a skilful way, with the ultimate goal of productivity, progress, and advantage.

1.2.2   Time and Space Modernised

As Sheikh notes (2017, p. 174), the neutralisation of modernisation that we thus far found regarding the self and the world he inhabits, can also be located in the modern experience of time and space. Whereas in the pre-modern world, time and space are entrenched in the inherent order of things, the forces of modernisation empty time and space of their intertwinement with life and experience.

Anthony Giddens described this intertwinement with life and experience by showing that in pre-modern times "no one could tell the time of day without reference to other socio-spatial markers" (1990, p. 17). Time was thus deeply rooted in activity, daily life, and specific places. Throughout modernity, however, time and space were gradually separated, especially through the invention and spreading of the mechanical clock.[8] The mechanical clock expressed a uniform dimension of 'empty' time, neutrally quantified in such a manner as to be able to measure time in units, allowing for maximisation of activity in a certain time frame. The subsequent standardisation of time allowed for effective social organisation and coordination across regions. Through the developments in modernity, time is thus emptied of its situatedness in everyday practices and consequently becomes the neutral homogenous background of measurement and coordination.

As Giddens (1990, p. 18) argues further, the emptying of time formed the pre-condition for the subsequent emptying of space, mainly since coordination across time forms the basis of the control of space. Empty space, as he explains, entails that space is separated from place. Even though these two terms are often conflated, place refers to the physical setting of social activity, in other words the idea of locale. In pre-modern societies, space and place coincide, as localised activities dominate the spatial dimensions of social life and face-to-face encounters form the basis of social life. In modernity, however, place becomes increasingly "*phantasmagoric*", that is, thoroughly moulded and shaped in terms of social influences *distant* from them (1990, p. 19).

As Sheikh (2017, p. 175) further notes, in the modern age the map changed accordingly, since instead of having a vertical axis, maps came to represent horizontal space. All places, including sacred ones, became dots on a neutral plain, equal to all other dots on the map. Parallel to the development of time, therefore, we can find a neutralisation of space, which is

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[8] As Giddens (1990, p. 19) later notes, these developments should not be seen as an all-encompassing, unilinear development. Rather, like all trends of development (in modernity), it has dialectical features that provoke opposing characteristics.

no longer imbued with inherent meaning or order, but becomes a homogenous background under the force of modernisation. Subsequently, nature becomes the raw material that man comes to possess and build upon.

1.2.3 Modern Dynamism

Giddens (1990, p. 20) sees the aforementioned phenomenon of the separation of time and space as crucial to the extreme dynamism that can be found at the core of modernity. Firstly, the separation of time and space, and their subsequent formation into standardised, 'empty' dimensions, establishes a rupture between social activity and its embeddedness in the particularity of local context. This disembedding force of modernisation that we can identify in this instance, serves to open up a variety of possibilities of change by becoming unconstrained of local habits and practices. Thus, although in the pre-modern world everything has a 'natural' place to which it inherently belongs, in modernity this inherent order is brutally shattered.

Secondly, and closely related to the previous point, this phenomenon opens up the possibility of rationalised organisation. In the modern era, this is the source of the energetic dynamism that contrasts sharply with pre-modern orders, as modern organisations, predicated on the idea of rationalised organisation, are able to connect the local and the global in a way unimaginable in traditional societies. In modernity, time and space are thus liberated from their local particularity, allowing for the institutionalisation of disembedded interaction; the modern social organisation is born.

1.3 MODERNITY AND PROGRESS

Thus far we have mainly analysed some aspects of the intellectual foundations and developments that constitute the modern era, but these developments would dynamically result in an even more radical transformation of economics, demographics, politics, and modern institutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sheikh (2017, p. 49) sees these rapid developments as constituting a 'matrix of modernisation', a general mould of modernisation that, across a range of fields, leads to a transformation of society that is global in nature.[9] The disembedding character of modernity, as explained in the previous section, lifts out social relations from local contexts of interaction, allowing for the dynamic transformation

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[9] This does not entail that modernisation is necessarily a process that follows a strict sequence, since, depending on the traditions that shaped pre-modern life in certain contexts, the paths of modernisation differ. Still, however, the universal character of modernisation can be conceptually and empirically demonstrated, meaning 'varieties of modernity' is a more appropriate notion than 'multiple modernities' (Schmidt, 2006)

and differentiation of social life and organisations, paving the road to Enlightenment-inspired progress and rationalised productivity. To see how the intellectual foundations and developments of modernity lead to this embrace of progress and productivity in social life and organisations, the main domains in which exponentially transformative dynamism can be found in late modernity will be briefly analysed in this section.

1.3.1 Industrialism and Capitalism

The restless and transformative character of modernity, according to Giddens (1990), can be accounted for in terms of the emergent social order of modernity that is capitalistic in its economic system as well as in its other institutions. The deeply engrained vision of the progress of mankind in modernity is represented by the investment-profit-investment cycle of capitalism, which brings about a constant drive for the system to expand and develop. With the deeply disruptive processes of social change at this stage of modernity, sociology starts to become more prominent, investigating the issues and consequences related to modernity, with Marx, Durkheim, and Weber at the frontier (Harris, 2000).

Émile Durkheim, one of the classical sociologists who explained the process of social change fundamental to modernisation, attributes the rise of modern institutions primarily to the impact of industrialism. Industrialism and economic modernisation signify the 'manipulative' modern attitude of relating to the world as the rapid developments during the times of industrialisation were fired by the rise of modern science and technology, and their instrumental value regarding the increase of productivity and material wealth. The transition from agriculture towards industry and services, as Sheikh (2017) explains, underpins the change of modern life, especially regarding urbanisation and individualisation.

Durkheim (1984) attributed the rapidly changing character of social life in modernity to this increase in productivity, which was only possible through the energising impulse of the complex division of labour that marks this age of mechanical productivity. An essential consequence of this successful division of labour through industrialisation is that collective experiences shared by all members of a certain group decline in intensity and frequency, leading to an individualisation of the population. The individual, therefore, decreasingly relates to reality from a collective conscience, and increasingly starts to express his own individuality. Furthermore, industrialisation, intertwined with technological innovations such as the railroad, the steam engine, and efficient production mechanisms, caused mobility to an extent never experienced before. Spurred by this increase in mobility, the modern factories in the cities

started to lead many individuals to personally embrace the same ideal of progress that marked the age they lived in, resulting in rapid urbanisation as well as the birth of the modern corporation.

The forces of modernisation may be most easily recognised in the rapid developments of the economy, signified by the rise of capitalism and the free market. These developments are described in detail by Walt Whitman Rostow (1990), who developed a model that accounts for the stages of economic modernisation. Whereas pre-modern markets were local and rural, revolving around small, self-sustaining communities, the developments laid out in the previous section have contributed to the rise of the modern corporation, the driver *par excellence* of economic modernisation. These corporations, and their growth facilitated by the invention of stock markets, allowed for great productivity, output, and diversification. Consequently, trade between nations is stimulated, and economic growth and investment becomes a central objective. As the process of modernisation unfolded itself, emphasis was put on free markets as the most efficient generator of output, driven by self-interest and the desire for profit.

The underlying foundation of the rise of the corporation follows the logic of modernity, especially with regards to the rational and systematic development of the means of production, and the management and organisation thereof. As Baudrillard (1987, p. 66) maintains, this marks modernity as the era of productivity, signified by an intensification of human labour and of human domination over nature, "both reduced to the status of productive forces and to the schemas of efficacy and maximal output". Thus, in the birth of the modern corporation and capitalism we can find the central vision that has driven the forces of modernisation from their outset, the vision of progress guided by rational optimism and faith in the scientific explicability and technological manipulability of the world.

1.3.2   The Bureaucratic State

The rapid industrialisation and economic modernisation have resulted in a convergence of state forms into the bureaucratic state (Riggs, 1997). Whereas pre-modern politics was deeply rooted in the meaningful order of the world, with the king ruling by virtue of God's authority and society structured as a hierarchy of personal relations, modern state forms become increasingly free from the constraints of local habits and embedded practices. Already during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the centralised monarchical state succeeds the feudal system with its administrative techniques (Baudrillard, 1987). However, the rise of the modern bureaucratic state is inextricably tied to the increase in economic interdependence in the

modern era, requiring an extensive bureaucracy to face the complexity of society and its (economic) institutions which added new tasks to the traditional functions of governance.

The aforementioned sociologist Max Weber (2015) has identified the main characteristics that set the modern bureaucratic state apart from its predecessors. The bureaucratic organisation is based on a hierarchy with clearly delineated activities and duties, wherein each lower office is controlled and supervised by a higher one. Similar to the division of labour in industrialised society, the modern bureaucratic state is based on a division of specialised tasks and competences. The administrative processes are based on stable rules that can be learned, and official records record all organisational activities. The modern expert is a vital player in the bureaucratic framework, replacing the 'cultivated man' that could be found in traditional bureaucracies (Sheikh, 2017, p. 39). The Weberian Bureaucracy thus forms a rationalised manner of bureaucratic administration, an efficient and productive machine or apparatus based on competence and rational governance rather than personal loyalty, that, once mature, "is an almost indestructible social structure" (Weber, 2015, p. 110).

As we have seen, modern bureaucratised public administration is inextricably intertwined with the new demands of industrialisation, but as Riggs (1997, p. 349) notes, this modern form of governance could be used to oppress people as well as to serve them. Hence, the question that should be addressed here is how the convergence of modernisation towards representative democracy can be explained. The bureaucratic state is, however, a necessary element of a democratic system of government that runs on officials who develop and implement policy, but the process that led to modern democracy can be found in the American and French Revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century, even though the process of democratisation after these upheavals took centuries. The steady rise of democracies throughout the modern era, however, can be attributed to the high level of economic development, which is a necessary yet insufficient condition for democratisation. Nevertheless, there is a connection between income and democracy, where the rise of a middle class is central. As Lipset (1959) maintains, the socio-economic developments regarding wealth, education, and literacy, spurred by industrialisation and urbanisation, were essential elements in the empowerment and emancipation of the modern individual. These developments give rise to the middle class, a large group of people in professions that are not succumbed to (traditional) authorities, giving them the possibility to challenge authoritative governance.

1.3.3   Reason, Autonomy, Progress

Even though the account above does not do justice to the rich history of modernity, we can identify the spirit of the force of modernisation that has swept throughout the Western world from the seventeenth century onwards. As we have seen, the dynamic and disruptive force of modernisation constituted a transformation on the level of the self, the world, and the way of relating to the world. The modern individual is no longer deeply nested in a traditional framework of inherently meaningful existence but becomes a neutral and autonomous force of manipulation guided by optimistic reason, and his old superstitions and beliefs slowly transform in a deeply held belief in scientific explicability and technological manipulability: The force of modernisation establishes a radical rupture in the condition of social existence. Accordingly, the world itself is rid of its preordained magical and spiritual order and becomes the stage for human action and progress, existing of neutral, value-free objects, the raw material for the technological (re)construction of the world.

The spirit of modernity, thus, is one inextricably tied up with the idea of progress (Wagner, 2017). The modern rupture in societal consciousness in Europe entailed the view of a new form of society, a society that follows the logic of an open horizon of future possibilities. This idea of endless opportunity and progress also changes man's relation to the world, which does not exist in humble acceptance of natural or divine constraints, but reinforces the idea of *makeability* in every domain, from the bureaucratic state to the investment-profit-investment cycle of capitalism, bringing about a constant and increasing drive for change, expanse, and development, rooted in technological innovation: "everything can be made, everything is at our disposal, everything can and must be changed, and change is always improvement" (Marquard, 1989, p. 69). Thus, man, instead of God, declares himself as creator of himself, his surroundings, and history itself; he becomes the centre, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of the world.

1.4   Informatisation as Hyper-Modernisation

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, modern man still remains faithful to the secular enlightenment-inspired vision of the limitless human drive towards economic growth, scientific innovation, and human progress that we find in modernity. However, as we will see, modern information technology and the technical way of relating to the world and humanity, constituting what Sheikh (2017, p. 12) names 'Technopolis', become even more central in the project of man's domestication of his own fate. Sheikh defines Technopolis as a sphere of

human living that is shaped by a technical way of relating to the world and humanity; a sphere where all elements are constantly reorganised and set into motion in an artificial, manmade environment. Even though modern technology is not the sole driver in this context, it does play a pivotal role in the unfolding of the matrix of modernity. This section will elaborate on the place, impact, and consequences of contemporary information technology in the matrix of modernisation that is unfolding itself with ever-increasing pace in modern man's habitus named Technopolis.

1.4.1   From Mechanisation to Informatisation

As Dijksterhuis (1986) maintains, with the development of classical physics and mechanics around the seventeenth century, the world witnessed a mechanisation of the worldview, underscoring the tendency of technological developments to lead to significant changes, not only in science, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, regarding man's way of relating to the world. The mechanistic worldview is based on the premise that the physical universe is a great machine and that nature can therefore be interpreted mathematically, since mechanics itself is mathematics. Three ontological premises can be drawn from this mechanistic worldview (De Mul, 1999). The first premise is that reality can be analysed and explained as a collection of elements that can be logically evaluated separately from each other. Secondly, these elements form a whole by means of laws that can be expressed mathematically, and therefore their behaviour can be predicted. Thirdly, following from the previous premises, there is a certain extent of controllability in this worldview, since knowledge of the fundamental mathematical principles that underlie mechanics can contribute to its control. Thus, the mechanisation of the worldview, which is in itself a neutralisation of the world as well, thus goes hand in hand with the changes in worldview effected by the matrix of modernisation.

Through the numerous technological advancements from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, information processing machines soon followed mechanical machines, and Jos De Mul (1999) sees this development as analogous to the mechanisation as described by Dijksterhuis. The introduction of these information processing machines therefore resulted in what De Mul calls the 'informatisation of the worldview', which proposes the view that the physical universe can be seen as an information-processing machine. Three ontological premises set the informatized worldview apart from the mechanistic one (De Mul, 1999, p. 84). Firstly, synthesisability entails that the form for a particular configuration of matter and energy on itself is matter for an even more complex form of organization. Secondly,

programmability means that courses of events can always be analysed in terms of a hidden algorithm, and therefore can be imitated by a computer program. Lastly, we can find the premise of manipulability, which entails the view that laws of nature are no longer basis of prediction and control, like in the mechanistic paradigm, but that they themselves are the object of control through programming.

The logical consequence of the process of informatization is that individuals come to see themselves as *inforgs* and *cyborgs* in the sense that they are increasingly interconnected and dependent on the technologies that allow them to synthesise, program, and manipulate information to understand the world and fulfil their personal ends and desires (Floridi, 2014). Therefore, we can identify the process of informatisation as a form of hyper-modernisation, since, parallel to the neutralisation of the world and the self in modernity, we witness an even further neutralisation in the sense that the perspectives of the world and the self are 'lifted out' of natural and local contexts of interaction and become homogeneously informational in essence. This disembedding process of neutralisation is underscored by the fact that modern individuals spend increasing amounts of time broadcasting themselves and digitally interacting with each other within an infosphere *that is neither entirely virtual nor only physical* (Floridi, 2014, p. 59). Consequently, the distinction between on the one hand analogue, carbon-based, offline reality and on the other hand digital, silicon-based, online reality is fast becoming blurred: "the digital-online world is spilling over into the analogue-offline world and merging with it" (idem., p. 43).

The process of informatisation and the development of communication technologies are deeply interrelated with the hyper-modern transformation of the world into a network society[10], a term coined by Jan van Dijk (2006) and Manuel Castells (2010). As Van Dijk (2006, p. 19) explains, in the network society, under the influence of a high level of information exchange and the use of information and communication technologies, the information intensity of all activities become so high that it leads to an organisation of society based on science, rationality, and reflexivity. Furthermore, the economy, in all its values and sectors, becomes increasingly characterised by information production, and the labour market becomes involved with tasks of information processing, requiring knowledge and higher

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[10] As Niall Ferguson (2017) argues in *The Square and the Tower*, the novelty of the 'network society' may be questioned, as societies based on networks have been an integral part of history for a long time already, albeit on a different quantitative and qualitative scale.

education. Lastly, the culture in this society is dominated by media and information products, with their own signs, symbols, and meanings.

Manuel Castells (2010, p. 31) adds further that the network age is characterised by the application of knowledge and information to knowledge generation and information processing devices, resulting in a cumulative feedback loop between innovation and the uses of innovation. The exponential character of the increase in processing power in the network society is emphasised in Moore's law (1965), which predicts that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years, meaning that the growth pattern in the complexity of processing power grows exponentially. Even though it is a generalization to a certain extent, one could, like Moravec (2000) argues, transpose Moore's law to technology in general, meaning that the exponential growth character of processing power is applicable to the whole realm of technological innovation.

The exponential growth of information and technological innovation, constituting a force of hyper-modernisation, has deep impacts on the perception of time and space as well. We have already seen that in the process of modernisation, time and space became 'empty' to a certain extent, but in the network society, the concept of temporality has become timeless, and space has transformed in a space of flows. Timeless time occurs when the characteristics of a given context "induce systemic perturbation in the sequential order of phenomena performed in that context" (Castells, 2010, p. 494). Through information and communication technologies, thus, time loses its biological sense and logical sequence; real-time communication is possible at distance as communication can now link up distant nodes while isolating the experience of being limited by spatiality. Space of flows, the new experience of space, therefore refers to the phenomenon of "practicing simultaneity without contiguity" (Castells, 2009, p. 34). Thus, whereas places used to determine the possibilities of contact and had a "certain naturalness to them as people 'belong' to a certain place" (Sheikh, 2017, p. 198), through the new spatiotemporal experience in the network society individuals are lifted out of the naturalness of an environment even further, and they are connected all the time and everywhere in this neutralised spatiotemporality.

1.4.2   Technology and Overcoming the Human Condition

"The human species, along with the computational technology it created, will be able to solve age-old problems … and will be in a position to change the nature of mortality in a post-biological future" (Kurzweil, 1999, p. 2). As this quote of Kurzweil shows, the secular,

enlightenment-inspired vision of the limitless drive towards technological and scientific innovation and human progress is taken even further in the twenty-first century, with technological advancement promising man to be able to transform the givens of his condition. In modernity, thus, the "idea of a set pattern of development is rejected as we reflexively reorganize life's material" (Sheikh, 2017, p. 201). Technological advancement not only promises man to get out of his *Unmündigkeit*, but it will, according to contemporary technological fundamentalists and transhumanists, actually be able to break the most fundamental shackles of man's condition, including life and death.

Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* can be seen as the precursor for the concept of transhumanism, a perspective that views human nature as a work-in-progress, rather than constrained by a static condition (Bostrom, 2005). Humans, according to the transhumanist movement, can make use of present technologies, like genetic engineering and information technology, to enhance human nature, through "radical extension of human health-span, eradication of disease, elimination of unnecessary suffering, and augmentation of human intellectual, physical, and emotional capacities" (Bostrom, 2005, p. 3). Technological progress thus is believed to overcome the fallibility that has marked mankind from its beginning, and to start a novel chapter of mankind.

Furthermore, cryonic freezing of bodies is a practice that is imbued with the belief that one day it will be possible to reanimate people who have frozen their bodies or brains. Similarly, after the aforementioned informatisation of the world picture, there is also an increasing number of people that believe they will one day be able to upload the human mind to a computer, by replicating the detailed computational processes that would normally take place in a human brain, overcoming the perhaps most fundamental and inevitable fact about human nature: death. In other words, technological fundamentalists and transhumanists envision a post-biological and post-human future, enabling humans to realise their ideals more effectively, while not being constrained by their natural and biological constitution. Lastly, this fundamental belief in technological progress also affects the envisioned future of governance and overcoming the problems related to human behaviour on a societal level. For example, contemporary China, under the rule of Xi Jingping, is already putting this vision into practice by developing a big-data based 'social credit system', where citizens can earn credits by behaving in a way desired by the government. The faith in human progress thus envisions a future without any of the boundaries incurred by man's condition, allowing humans to become Gods themselves, and acquire their own salvation here and now.

1.4.3   The Red Thread of Modernisation

In conclusion, even though the force of modernisation may appear to be a scattered and ambiguous one, we can identify certain principles that are universal throughout the different paths of modernisation that the world has witnessed. Through man's capacity for disengaged, instrumental reason and the scientific explicability and technological manipulability of the world, rooted in early modern and enlightenment thought, the project of modernity is fundamentally the mastery and control over nature and man's destiny. French philosopher and novelist Chantal Delsol accurately articulates this fundamental and essentially coherent feature of modern thought:

"Modern man wanted to cut his mooring, to transform the givens of his condition. The phenomenon we call modernity appears to be multiple and plural. It encompasses the most diverse currents of thought and is expressed through different achievements. A hidden thread, however, ties these diversities together: the ever-present rejection of circumstances or properties whose permanence had marked humanity since its origins." (2003, p. xxviii)

It is thus in the rejection and attempt at overcoming man's finitude and fallibility, his shortcomings altogether, that binds together the many different yet interrelated political, social, economic, technological, and psychological changes that we can identify in the modern West. However, the question is if these changes and developments have truly resulted in the realisation of this central vision.

Throughout modernity the West has transformed from a deeply religious, feudal, patriarchal, and unequal society to one with democracy, universal suffrage, education, healthcare, and a constitution guaranteeing inalienable human rights. From the start of modernity, scientific developments have increased knowledge and understanding of the world, allowing us to grapple with many diseases while dramatically increasing life expectancy. Through industrialism and capitalism, economic growth and commerce have risen steeply, leading to international trade and peace as well as allowing for the rise of a middle class, which fosters democratisation. Urbanisation has furthermore led to increased literacy, a rise in education, and a growth of production. Also, the bureaucratic state has provided the conditions for the effective and structured governance of society. Therefore, it indeed appears that man, compared to life before the sixteenth century, has shaken the yoke of nature off him and freed himself from the restraints of life through the immense force of modernisation that vehemently overturned the pre-modern ways of relating to the world. Thus, above all the force of modernisation is an energising one that can turn the dreams of human and material

progress into reality. However, as will be argued in the next part this liberation came at a cost, since man, taking himself as the measure of all things, purchased the rise in his power with estrangement from the world he inhabits, resulting in the modern tragedy of chaos, detachment, and meaninglessness.

PART TWO

THE TRAGEDY OF MODERN LIFE: DISRUPTIVE, DISEMBEDDING DISENCHANTMENT

"Does anyone not know the story of Icarus? To escape from the labyrinth, he flies up on a pair of waxen wings but, in spite of the warnings he receives, comes too close to the sun. The wax melts, throwing him into the sea, where he drowns. Now let us imagine that young Icarus manages to actually live through this ordeal: he falls back into the labyrinth, where he finds himself horribly bruised but still alive…He has to go back to a normal life after having thought himself capable of attaining the sun, the supreme good" (Delsol, 2003, p. xxiii).

As Chantal Delsol explains in *Icarus Fallen*, today we find ourselves in a tragic situation very similar to the Greek mythological figure Icarus. Modern man, taking on a superhuman project, believed himself capable of fundamentally transforming his condition through the modern pursuit of scientific explicability and technological mastery of the world. However, this dream of mastery and progress was brutally scattered during the twentieth century, and contemporary man is now confronted with "the wreckage – metaphorical and real – of all our dreams, our religions, political ideologies and a thousand other aspirations, all of which in their turn have proved false" (Murray, 2017, p. 221). The modern project of overcoming the human condition through becoming God himself has resulted in the destructive forces that swept through twentieth-century Europe in the form of totalitarian attempts to re-create the world: Millions of people died for the sake of progress, from the rationally organised extermination during the Holocaust to the horrors of the Soviet Union gulags.

The problems that marked the twentieth century, however, are still very much present in the twenty-first century, as in fighting the inevitabilities of the human condition, modern man has immersed himself in a profound tragedy. By trying to rid himself of political authority, of the oppositions between good and evil, of God, and of human imperfection in general, contemporary man has crumbled the foundational narratives, mythical and religious, that embedded him in his existence. Man, thus becomes detached, disembedded, and alienated from his condition and place in the world: "human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947, p. 6). With the collapse of the relevance and authority of traditional and mythological explanations of the world, replaced by the project of the total domestication of his own fate, modern man has thus destroyed the structures that theretofore irreplaceably imbued life with meaning and purpose. In this section the tragedy of modern life will be further discussed, as to delineate how the force of modernisation has a dark side that uproots modern man and *dis*embeds him, leading to a profound problem of meaninglessness.

2.1 OFFICIAL DEFATALISATION & UNOFFICIAL REFATALISATION

The aforementioned dark side of modern thought is insightfully developed by German philosopher Odo Marquard, who emphasises the relation between modern thought and modern man's stance towards fate. The writings of Marquard are especially relevant to the matter at hand because they underscore the positive role of tradition in coping with the fateful nature of human existence, and the consequences of modern thought on this relation. Marquard stresses that, even though modern thought has put man at the centre of the universe and man accordingly sees himself as the creator of himself and the world around him, there are certain inevitabilities over which no man has the power of disposition due to his fallibility. One of these inevitabilities is the fact that human life is fundamentally finite and short, meaning that we can never arrive at pure truths ourselves, always relying on custom and tradition in order to make sense of the world. Yet, modern man has a different stance towards the world, as he wants to take over the role of God after modern secularisation. This maintained illusion of pure autonomy and makeability, however, does not prevent modern man from being confronted with the tragedy of modern life, as man remains finite and fateful by nature. This section will elaborate further on Marquard's critical stance towards modern thought, to identify what constitutes the aforementioned tragedy of modern life.

2.1.1 From God's Goodness to God's Nonexistence

As Marquard (1989, p. 66) writes, it seems that fate is an antiquated concept, as nowadays each of us lives their own life, as autonomous agents living in circumstances shaped and produced by human self-determination. As we have seen, this thought finds its origin in modernity, as it contains the vision of endless opportunity and progress, leading man to conceive himself as the master of the world, building upon it and improving it. Consequently, everything is makeable instantly, and it seems almost as things over which we have no power do not exist: "the unalterable, it seems is played out; fate has come to an end" (Marquard, 1989, p. 66). Thus, the dominant view throughout modernity is that all things can be made, and that everything is at our disposal, ready to be manipulated for the sake of improvement. This ideology of makeability and changeability extends as far as to man's own fundamental condition, as we have seen that modern man took on a superhuman project in an attempt to eradicate all constraints and properties that had theretofore permanently marked humanity.

This project started with the decline of the Christian worldview, which had taught mankind about his innate sinfulness and the path towards salvation, sought in an absolute deity, rather

than in man himself: "the omnipotent creator alone, and no one else, makes everything, and guides everything" (Marquard, 1989, p. 69). God, thus, is the end of fate, since he is the omnipotent and omniscient controller; he is the only creator, and guides everything. Yet, the force of modernisation did not leave religion or God untouched, and the belief in God as omnipotent creator did not seem compatible with the enlightenment maxim *Sapere Aude*, leading to the belief in the omnipotence of man himself. God, thus, was declared dead in modernity, causing mankind to take his place as creator, and Marquard traces the first expressions of this thought to German Idealism[11] with its *interference from God's goodness to God's nonexistence*. How can God and his goodness be justified in a world marked by suffering and evil? It is this question, addressed by theodicy, that resulted in the interference from God's goodness to his nonexistence. Therefore, as Marquard (1989, p. 71) writes, the fact that modern man "becomes maker, creator, and redeemer, is due precisely to the fact that God ceases to be these things" (Marquard, 1989, p. 71).

2.1.2 The End of God as Unofficial Refatalisation

However, if God is the end of fate, and God ceases to exist for moderns, what does the end of God mean for fate? In modern times, Marquard writes, after the end of the God who was the end of fate, the official defatalisation of the world is accompanied by its unofficial refatalisation. This unofficial refatalisation is incurred through the unavoidable human lack of disposition over what is pregiven. Marquard here refers to the inevitabilities of the condition of mankind that the project of modernity attempts to eradicate; not only the inevitabilities of finitude and mortality, but, perhaps more fundamentally, the fact that "human beings never begin at the beginning" (1989, p. 73). All humans live with prior givens over which they have no control and therefore they will have to accept history as a basis of action. Marquard quotes Luhmann, who calls this 'involuntary conservatism', since, given the finiteness of human beings, they will have to rely on what was passed onto them in custom or tradition. Life is too short, *vita brevis*, meaning that no human being has the power or time to distance himself from the past and surroundings, to examine the true and absolute reality that underlies human existence. Together with Marquard, therefore, we can conclude that man will never become

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[11] Besides German Idealism, Marquard quotes thinkers from a variety of backgrounds and schools who, according to him, "cannot, in fact, desire to be quoted together" (p. 71), leading him to conclude that the agreement that they disguise is evidence for the fact that this thought is a converging tendency in modern thought and self-understanding.

autonomous to the extent that he takes on the role of God as creator of everything; the ideology of makeability turns out to be a modern illusion.

Besides the fact that human beings are involuntary conservative, Marquard (1989, p. 76) points out that human beings never have complete disposition over the consequences of their actions, reintroducing fate unofficially. Therefore, even though it might seem that modern makeability puts an end to fate, man keeps being confronted with his fallibility: "Just where humans – officially – become the heirs of its absolute end, fate is – unofficially – inescapably there again" (Marquard, 1989, p. 81). This is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the fact that the utopian dreams fostered by modern man's godlike project of changing the world and its conditions, were shattered by the totalitarian nightmares of the twentieth century. The inescapable finitude of mankind was denied by those who believed in the progress that enlightened man would bring about, yet this denial resulted in tragedy. Modern man, thus, was no longer "engaged in a quest for the good, but the very inventor of the good…he ceased to be a being who stood for something, and became instead a being who tried to take possession of what he stood for" (Delsol, 2003, p. 12). In a movement of *grasping*, an attempt at complete control and possession, man thus reintroduced fate on himself, while distancing himself from the world he inhabits.

2.1.3   The Rebirth of Tragedy

The contemporary reintroduction of tragedy, despite modern affirmations of makeability, becomes most apparent through the domain of technology. Even though 'planners and makers', central to modern professionalism and bureaucracy, practice crisis management by producing (technological) measures against unforeseen consequences that have gotten out of control, these measures produce consequences that get out of control due to man's fallibility. This is a theme further elaborated upon by De Mul (2014), who argues in his book, subtitled 'The Rebirth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Technology', that humans have invented technologies that constitute man's grandeur, but at the same time these technologies bring about a tragic dimension in modern life. Thus, parallel with the unofficial refatalisation as articulated by Marquard, we can find the return of tragedy in modern life through the very technological inventions that were supposed to release him from his fallible condition. In tragedy, a fateful outcome is inevitable, as the individual involved in the tragedy must make an impossible choice; he either executes the fatal outcome, or himself.

The tragedy of modern life, in which the technological mastery of the world is central, consists in the fact that "man not only liberates himself from the shortcomings that he suffers through technologies, but that this liberation comes at the price of a new, eternal servitude" (De Mul, 2014, p. xviii). In other words, technological progress does involve a certain kind of liberation, but at the same time the mastery of technology paradoxically results in man's enslavement to these technologies: those who play with fire must suffer the burns it causes. The ultimate reason for this enslavement comes forth from the fact that he who uses technologies must be able to calculate the consequences of their use *beforehand,* but as De Mul maintains in similar fashion to Marquard, man is mortal and does not have a foreseeing eye; he does not have complete disposition over the consequences of his actions, even if, and perhaps especially if, they are executed by means of technology.

Tragedy thus arises from man's finitude, but as De Mul (2014, p. 14) explains, not every form of suffering is tragic; only when freedom and necessity come together, paradoxically tragedy arises. The many natural disasters that man has witnessed throughout the centuries, for example, may be dreadful disasters, yet they cannot be called tragedies, because they do not result directly from human action. Nevertheless, the modern stance of manipulation and exploitation of the natural world through technology has resulted in perhaps the most visible tragedy of modern life: the disastrous deterioration of our planet as a consequence of technological progress. Thus, modern man's self-incurred responsibility of making and creating everything *ex nihilo* by means of technology (instead of God) turns out to evoke all elements necessary for the reawakening of tragic awareness (De Mul, 2014, p. xxi). Confronted with the unofficial refatalisation accompanying the attempt of complete mastery, modern man as the fallen Icarus, realises in astonishment that "total control over fate was a dangerous illusion" (De Mul, 2014, p. 19).

However, the rebirth of tragedy[12] through the ambivalent character of technology does not mean that technology should be abandoned – if possible in the first place – because of its destructive effects, since after all, as De Mul maintains, quoting Plessner, man is 'artificial by nature': "man only becomes himself through the supplemental means of technology and culture" (2014, p. 213). Rather, through the return of tragedy – ironically in the realm of technology in which we believed it had been abolished – the circumstances are instigated for

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[12] De Mul (2014, p. 62) does emphasise that modern culture differs in many respects from the Greek culture that produced tragedy, but despite these cultural differences tragedy repeats itself, albeit in a different manner.

man to reflect humbly on his inevitable condition as well as to have hopeful faith in the titanic power of technology. Through the refatalisation and the rebirth of tragedy in modern times, thus, man is confronted with his fallibility as if he indeed is Icarus who survived the fall. However, as will be argued in the next section, building further on the analysis provided here, in his attempt to overcome his fallibility and to reach the sun, modern man has evoked another, more profound tragedy related to his

2.2 Disenchantment and the Death of God: Nietzsche, Weber, & Taylor

One of the most frequently discussed topics within the context of modernity is the disenchantment of the world under the force of modernisation. Modern man, in his godlike attempt of complete control and possession, has metaphorically declared God dead, an act with profound consequences. Nietzsche accurately predicted the consequences of the gradual collapse of the meaningful framework that revolved around traditional and mythological explanations of the world, replaced by the view of the neutral world as raw material on which the autonomous subject forces its will. For how could an approach to the world – the Christian tradition in the case of Europe – that gave direction and purpose to society and its people for thousands of years, simply be disregarded without consequences? In this section the disenchantment of the world, as well as its relation to the problem of meaning central to this thesis, will be explored further by chronologically analysing the writings of three thinkers that have dealt with this theme in detail: Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, and Charles Taylor. Even though these thinkers may have slightly different views on the problem at hand as well as its potential solutions, together they provide a strong and coherent image of what disenchantment and the 'death of God' entails and what its consequences are for modern man in search of meaning.

2.2.1 Friedrich Nietzsche and the Madman

Nietzsche, unlike Weber and Taylor, does not explicitly use the term 'disenchantment' to delineate the developments of modernity. Nevertheless, Nietzsche had a deep and almost prophetic insight in the far-reaching consequences of the retreat of religion and myth through the force of modernisation. His ideas on disenchantment and its consequences are most notably articulated in *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche tells the parable of the madman, a narrative that goes further than the simple declaration of God's death, as it sheds new light on the cause, as well as the catastrophic consequences of this tragic event:

"Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" … "I will tell you. *We have killed him –* you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? … Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?" (1882/1974, p. 181)

The cause of God's death, as Nietzsche writes, is modern man himself, driven by his quest for total autonomy, control, and understanding, he could not but take God's place as maker, creator, and redeemer of everything. Man, thus *needed* to kill God to take his place, a task virtually impossible since it unchains 'the earth from its sun'. However, by breaking away from the central factor in the meaningful structures that gave direction and purpose in life, modern man has destroyed his theretofore undoubted and ever-present source of meaning, relevance, and purpose, leading to a deep sense of confusion and meaninglessness; the advent of nihilism. As Nietzsche writes, we no longer know where to go, we have destroyed every sense of moral direction and coherence. As Marx and Engels (1948) described, in modernity 'all that is solid melts into air', and the aforementioned prophecy of Nietzsche already foreshadows that traumatic experience, invoked by the force of modernisation. Nietzsche could thus be seen as a modern day prophet because his insight in the inevitable consequences of the death of God were accurate, as described by Walter Kaufmann: "He felt the agony, the suffering, and the misery of a godless world so intensely, at a time when others were yet blind to its tremendous consequence, that he was able to experience in advance, as it were, the fate of a coming generation" (1950/2013, p. 98)

The death of God through the force of modernisation also marks an end of truth for Nietzsche, since there is no absolute basis from which to discern 'what is up and what is down' because no longer the encounter with absolute moral perfection can serve as a point of reference for fallible humans to strive for. Consequently, any new system that seeks a resolution of the negativity of existence cannot claim any ultimate justification, since it merely regarded as a manmade construct (Hatab, 1987). Any ground for establishing an essential self or human nature is thus ruled out in modern thought, as later affirmed by Sartre's "existence precedes essence" (1946/2007, p. 20). There is therefore no longer anything that dictates and defines a person's character or goal in life; man makes himself. Subsequently, in modernity the structures of the human condition are seen as products of culture and therefore destructible.

Together with Nietzsche, therefore, we can state that the death of God *leaves man with no absolute reference outside of itself*; the structures of truth, as well as its constituents in the form of traditions and ethical systems revolving around the absolute, start to crumble with the declaration of God's death.

To uphold that existence is imbued with meaning, however, is to affirm the distance between human existence and its references; it is to affirm the inability for them to be one and the same thing, whilst not giving up *hope* to gradually be able to mature towards this point of reference outside oneself. Modern man, though, ceased to be a being who stood for something higher than himself, and became instead a being who tried to take possession and control of what he stood for, with the ultimate aim of someday having no longer to stand for anything at all; to be completely autonomous (Delsol, 2003, p. 12). Yet, the pretension of modern thought to be able to conflate existence and that which is worth striving for, the hubristic attempt to eradicate the inevitable and paradoxical conditions of existence, results in nihilism and meaninglessness, as prophesied by Nietzsche. The story of Icarus thus unfolds itself yet again, and even though modern man is the cause of God's death, he had no idea what the universe without an inherently meaningful order would look like.

2.2.2 Weberian Rationalisation & Disenchantment

The profound consequences of Nietzsche's insight were further developed by sociologist Max Weber, who formalised the intuitions of Nietzsche in the concept of 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*) and developed an elaborate account of its causes inherent to modern thought. Weber noted that the philosophical and scientific developments in modernity, had caused the realms of religion, theology, and tradition to be conceived of as superstition, mystical, and irrational. Through the many intertwined processes of modernisation, with rationalisation[13] at its foundation, magic or myth was gradually perceived to be incapable of explaining the world, and therefore unseated by a rational[14] and calculative stance, which had proven to be a better means for attaining the modern human ends of progress and control. Thus, while the pre-modern world as a 'great enchanted garden' revolved around the conception of nature as

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[13] Weber explains that rationalisation is not a concept with a singular meaning, and it can show itself in many different domains. Furthermore, it is not exclusively a consequence of modernity, as Weber (1978, p. 1464) explains that some variants of rationalisation find their origins in Ancient Judaism or in Roman Law.

[14] Importantly, Weber distinguishes between two types of rationality: instrumental rationality (*zweckrational*) is determined by expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and is about the means for the attainment of a rationally pursued and calculated end, whereas value rationality (*wertrational*) is determined by a conscious belief in a value based on ethics, aesthetics, or religious sources (Weber, 1978, pp. 24-5).

intrinsically purposive, with God being active in all domains of life, this pre-modern cosmos "gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic nation state" (Bennett, 2006, p. 212).

According to Weber, these combined rationalising forces of modernity, installing the unique rationality of modern society, put knowledge, impersonality, and enhanced control at the centre of man's way of relating to the world (Brubaker, 1984). Subsequently, this knowledge becomes the basis for rational action, spurred by the rise of systematic empirical science and scientific technology, and the growing complexity of social life in modernity fuels an ever-growing demand for specialised technical knowledge, leading to a vicious circle of displacement of the cultivated man by the specialised expert as the character expressing the central values of society. Furthermore, the objectification and de-personalisation of relations of power in politics as well as in economic spheres causes modern man to become increasingly impersonal, meaning that it becomes more difficult for activities in these spheres to be "meaningfully guided by ethical ideals such as *caritas* or brotherliness" (Brubaker, 1984, p. 28). Moreover, through rationalisation the scope of control over society, men, and nature is widened, as seen in the rise of capitalist corporation and the bureaucratic organisation. Thus, the modern disenchantment of the world renders 'wonder' and 'marvel' as superstitious or illusionary through their demystification by science: Spirituality becomes secularised, bureaucratisation replaces spontaneity, and instrumental rationality becomes paramount, as opposed to imagination and fantasy.

Indeed the disenchanting processes of modernisation have resulted in a greater calculability, (technological) manipulability, and mastery of societal and natural processes, but as Weber maintains, it does not necessarily follow that modernisation has resulted in "a greater knowledge of the conditions of life under which we exist" (1946, p. 139). Weber refers to Leo Tolstoi, who described that for modern man death has no meaning because his individual life is placed into an infinite progress, the force driving modernisation, and this progress "to its own imminent meaning should never come to an end; for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress" (Weber, 1946, p. 140). Hence, modern man, placed in the chaos of the continuous development of ideas, knowledge, and problems, may become 'tired of life' but never fulfilled, as what he seizes is always something provisional and never definitive, resulting in the inherent meaninglessness of death. As Weber concludes, because death is meaningless in this infinite progress, so is his life as such.

Yet again, thus, we can conclude that the increased power and mastery of life in modernity comes with a cost that is beyond measure, since in defining nature as a mechanism of material parts (or informational fragments in the context of hyper-modernisation), in reducing the definition of nature to materialistic, deterministic, and devoid of spirit, awaiting the manipulation of man through instrumental rationality and technology, the modern scientific and rational way of relating to the world empties the lived, experience-based, natural world of moral significance and meaning (Bennett, 2006, p. 216). Even though a disenchanted, scientific approach to reality may be able to answer questions about *means*, it does not and cannot answer the question of *ends*, for it offers no answer to the question "what shall we do and how shall we live?" (Weber, 1946, p. 140).

Thus, as Weber maintains, through the many interrelated processes of modernisation the world becomes disenchanted, losing its magical and spiritual significance, resulting in the fact that henceforth the processes of the world "simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything" (1978, p. 506). Whereas one may expect that with the disenchantment of the world individuals no longer need a meaningful structure because the scientific world-view can substitute for its function, Weber explains that the *inherently human need for meaning and significance* becomes ever more difficult to satisfy once the process of rationalisation unfolds itself, since the disinterested, scientific approaches to reality do not contain any value-orientations in themselves, even though they may be based on underlying, *presupposed* value-orientations (Brubaker, 1984, p. 66). From a purely rationalised, scientific stance, thus, no *Weltanshauung* (comprehensive worldview) can be obtained, meaning that value-orientations cannot be derived from scientific inquiry: "we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect" (Weber, 1949, p. 57). The most fundamental values of life, therefore, cannot merely be products of increased empirical and scientific knowledge, yet through the force of modernisation the traditional sources of moral orientation and meaning have commonly become marginalised as archaic, superstitious, and irrational, leaving modern man imprisoned in the 'iron cage' of instrumental rationality, ultimately eroding deep value commitments and triggering the crisis of meaninglessness.

2.2.3   Charles Taylor and the Malaise of Modernity

Like Weber, the contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor turns against the positivistic and naturalistic determination of man as proclaimed in modernity, and sees that human beings are characterised by the ability of finding meaning, making sense, and searching common cultural significance (Reckling, 2001). Whereas we have seen that Weber analysed

disenchantment predominantly in terms of rationalisation, for Taylor a crucial factor in the analysis of modernity and its discontents is the process of secularisation and its impact on the ability of individuals to conceive of the world meaningfully: "why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?" (2007, p. 25). Taylor traces the impact of the processes of disenchantment, secularisation, and rationalisation back to the development of the modern understanding of what it means to be a human individual. In his account, Taylor stresses the meaning-laden nature of human perception, contrasting starkly with the modern view of human perception as a theory-free experience of uninterpreted facts. Human beings, as he maintains, are already embedded in a world of pre-existing and pre-interpreting cultural significance, formed by the intersubjective meanings that result from the historically formed self-interpretations, providing a common basis of understanding. Taylor, therefore, also contends with the aforementioned neutralised view of human nature as a *tabula rasa*, and with his account Taylor intends to reveal how modern epistemology can erroneously lead to a disintegration of the moral sources, instigating the *malaise of modernity*, characterised by problems of meaning and identity that were unbeknown to individuals living in the pre-modern era.

Taylor's unique contribution to the disenchantment narrative can be found in his insistence of acknowledging its historically complex character, which he finds is frequently overlooked when the narrative of disenchantment is reduced to a simple 'subtraction story'. Often the story of secularisation in the West is described as invoked by a scientific, naturalistic explanation of the world that stimulated individuals to look for alternatives for God, instigating a progressive disenchantment that results in a dramatic decrease of individuals who proclaim their faith, ultimately resulting in a loss of the role of religion in the public sphere. Even though Taylor acknowledges these developments in modernity, he finds this narrative to be a reductionary subtraction story that attributes everything to disenchantment and the liberation of humans from confining horizons, illusions, or limitations of knowledge (2007, p. 26). This 'science-beats-religion' thesis is not problematic because it is completely incorrect but because it is seriously incomplete. Firstly, these subtraction stories, that portray the decline of religion as a subtraction that contributes to the march of human progress, do not adequately take into account the fundamental role that religion *itself* has played in the process of disenchantment.[15]

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[15] As, for example, the religious sources of secularisation as found in the process of Reformation and the turn to personal religion. In this process, the mediation of the Catholic Church was rejected, and personal

Furthermore, considering the religiosity of Bacon and Descartes as described above, upholding the narrative that attributes secularisation solely to the rise of modern science itself proves to be inconsistent. From the above follows that we cannot simply state that the only difference between pre-modern, pre-secular society and modern secularity is the presence of religion itself. Rather, as Taylor argues, it is important to uncover the "underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside" (2007, p. 22).

How does Taylor identify the shift in these underlying features of human nature through the processes of modernisation that have caused such far-reaching changes between 1500 and 2000? As Taylor explains, the story of secularisation is so multi-faceted and heterogeneous, following diverse paths through different nations and regions, that only a very general picture of the dynamic involved in the secularisation story can be accounted for. In the pre-modern, enchanted world there was no clear demarcation between personal agency and impersonal force, and people understood themselves as being part of this enchanted world, imbued with pre-ordained meaning and purpose. Meanings, thus, were not merely located in the minds of people, but rather they existed independently of humans, meaning they could be found in things, "or in various kinds of extra-human but intra-cosmic subjects" (2007, p. 33). The world, accordingly, was a world of spirits, with on one hand bad spirits, including Satan, demons, and other spirits that represent danger and chaos, and on the other hand good spirits such as God, his saints, and other spirits that represent protection and order. The enchanted cosmos, thus, was characterised by the contrast between good and evil; sacred and profane. The existence of God, nevertheless, was seen as the guarantee that good would triumph and all human spiritual and moral goodness reflected God's moral excellence accordingly.

Taylor continues to explain that the sense and place of the self in this enchanted world is embedded and porous. In the cosmos that incorporates the divine, God, society, and humans are deeply intertwined, resulting in an embeddedness of human agents. As Taylor (2007, p. 149) explains, from the standpoint of the individual's sense of self, this embeddedness means that humans were not able to imagine themselves outside a certain matrix. This embeddedness, subsequently, causes the pre-modern self to be porous and vulnerable, because the boundary between agents and forces of good and evil are fuzzy. Therefore, 'inside' and 'outside' are categories that make no sense to the porous individual: "emotions which are

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commitments and faith became more central, resulting in the real locus of religion to become identified with individual experience (Taylor, 1989, p. 215).

in the very depths of human life exist in a space which takes us beyond ourselves, which is porous to some outside power, a person-like power" (2007, p. 36).

Yet, in the modern, disenchanted world, instead of God, the human mind becomes the central factor in the search for meaning through the many intertwined processes of modernisation: "people no longer feel…that the spiritual dimension of their lives was incomprehensible if one supposed there was no God" (Taylor, 1989, p. 310). God, thus, was conceived of as the only credible source of moral orientation, but in late modernity God is no longer seen as a crucial moral source, since modern thought proposed that reason or moral sentiments could similarly shed light on people's moral predicament (Lombo de León & van Leeuwen, 2003). Taylor here demonstrates that secularisation has not just developed on neutral epistemic or institutional grounds, but rather on moral and spiritual grounds, meaning that the aforementioned 'science-beats-religion' subtraction story of secularisation, portraying religious belief as irrational, unenlightened, and unscientific, is an inadequate account of secularisation, especially in light of the fact that "much of the development of modern science was from the beginning bound up with a religious outlook" (1989, p. 310).

In the disenchanted world, we can thus identify a turn towards the human mind, transforming the sense and place of the self to a modern, 'buffered' self, for whom "the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind" (Taylor, 2007, p. 38), and this disengagement, guided by instrumental reason, is frequently carried out in relation to one's whole surroundings, natural and social. Thus, whereas the porous self was a vulnerable being under the forces of the cosmos, deeply embedded in the structure of existence, the modern, buffered self can distance himself and become disengaged from everything outside his mind. The buffered self, thus, revolves around itself, since its ultimate purposes are those that arise within him, and the crucial meanings of things are those defined by the self in his responses to them (Taylor, 2007, p. 38). The things or forces *beyond* the buffered self thus need not necessarily 'get to him', since it can see itself as invulnerable, as master of himself and his surroundings. The possibility of disengagement that the buffered self has, applies not only to the world, but also to social practices, devotions, traditions, social bonds, etc. Thus, while the embedded, pre-modern self is deeply embedded in social structures, the natural world, and religious practices that reflect the teleological order of the cosmos, the modern *dis*embedded self becomes focused on himself and his inner thoughts and feelings, granting "unprecedented primacy to the individual" (Taylor, 2007, p. 146). Consequently, the disembedded individual imagines himself being capable of remaking himself

from scratch, reinforcing the idea of makeability without historical context, by the use of disengaged, instrumental reason (Taylor, 1989, p. 171).

Important to note before proceeding, however, is that the dichotomy between the porous and buffered self as explained by Taylor can be problematic depending on its interpretation. Whereas it can fruitfully function as a way of elucidating the influence of the primacy of disengaged instrumental reason in modernity – as well as the processes of modernisation in general – on the modern self and his relation to the world, contrasting starkly with the porous self, the danger of the dichotomy resides in the fact that it is a vast generalisation. The process of modernisation, thus, does not involve a magical transformation of the structures of the self from being completely porous, that is to say, without buffer, to completely buffered and impenetrable by external influences. Rather, one should see the process of modernisation as slowly but surely *thickening* the already-existing buffer around the porous individual, meaning that beneath the buffer, which remains penetrable to a certain extent, we can still find the porous, pre-modern self; the pre-condition for the buffered self, for without it, the buffer would have nothing to shield.

To continue, the decline of pre-modern structures of meaning and significance, and the disembedding of the individual out of its meaningful surroundings, followed by a retreat in the mind of the self, constitutes a primary interpretation of the world that Taylor calls the 'immanent frame', which he further describes as:

"the sense of an absence; it is the sense that all order, all meaning comes from us. We encounter no echo outside. In the world read this way, as so many of our contemporaries live it, the natural/supernatural distinction is no mere intellectual abstraction. A race of humans has arisen which has managed to experience its world entirely as immanent" (Taylor, 2007, p. 376).

In this immanent frame, in which transcendence does not have any place, everything significant becomes of *this* world; it becomes explicable in its own terms. Social and political orders, for example, do not reflect a divine plan, but rather reflect the will of humans to construct a society to their mutual benefit, making instrumental rationality paramount. A key aspect of the emergence of the immanent frame is therefore rise of science, which gave a clear theoretical form to the idea of an immanent order "which could be understood on its own, without reference to intervention from outside" (Taylor, 2007, p. 543). Exploring the phenomenal world of Kant, science expects to find sufficient material and efficient causes for everything that humans experience (Lowney, 2017, p. 152). Consequently, the transcendent

is discarded since it does not fit the rational, scientistic outlook, and the disengaged reductive methods of science are seen as sufficient for understanding all areas of human knowledge. As Marquard proclaimed, man seemingly becomes the maker, creator, and redeemer of everything, but again it appears that man is not very good at these things on his own, since, as the quote above reveals in line with the earlier discussions on Nietzsche and Weber, the immanent frame, having rejected the transcendent, is haunted by an absence of some sort; the sense that the theretofore obvious sources of meaning have melted into air.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor describes in more detail how the aforementioned loss or absence constitutes the malaise of modernity. In brief, the emergence of the immanent frame, accompanied by the buffered self, constitutes a "loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons" (Taylor, 1991, p. 10). Through the erosion of social and cosmic sources of pre-ordained meaning that legitimised older meanings as espoused by tradition and religion, the modern individual can have trouble constructing viable new meanings that are deep enough to provide him with a sense of fulness and meaning. In the culture of immanence, anthropocentrism is reinforced as the fading of the moral horizon causes individuals typically to embrace a kind of relativism in which free choice legitimises any moral decision: "no one has a right to criticize another's values" (Taylor, 1991, p. 45). As Taylor explains, however, even the assertion that the significance of one's life comes from the fact that its path has been chosen, depends in itself on the understanding that *independent of my will* there is something outside of me that is noble, courageous, or good, and hence significant in giving meaning to my life. The presumption of immanent subjectivism[16] about values and significance being *chosen*, thus is self-defeating (Taylor, 1991, p. 40).

Besides the immanent frame of subjectivism being self-defeating, it would never be able to accommodate meaning, especially when we consider that to have meaning, to *signify*, is to be a sign for a referent outside of oneself; "to stand for something other than oneself, to establish a link with a value, an idea, an ideal beyond oneself" (Delsol, 2003, p. 4), while also affirming the distance and irreconcilability between existence itself and its reference. The self-transcending character of the quest for meaning that Delsol describes here is closely related to the concept of *will to meaning*, developed by neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl

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[16] This modern subjectivism stems from the 'projective view' of morality, the Enlightenment-inspired assertion that qualities and values are epiphenomenal subjective illusions that we impose upon a value-neutral, mechanistic universe. As Taylor maintains, however, individuals need a qualitative discrimination of the incomparably higher to meaningfully orient themselves in moral space (Taylor, 1989, p. 47).

(Reference). Frankl describes that man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life, and not a mere secondary rationalisation of instinctual drives. The will to meaning is thus the primary basis of significance for man's existence as well as the human capacity to strive for something that transcends himself and his own interest, to ultimately serve the 'greater good'. The will to meaning thus ultimately represents the deepest and universal human need to reach beyond oneself and signify something incomparably greater. From this follows that individuals are responsible and must actualise the potential meaning of their life, which is to be "discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system" (Frankl, 1984, p. 133). Frankl, thus, shows that one can only walk the path towards meaning, significance, and fulfilment by having a reference point greater than oneself. Delsol provides examples of this feature of meaningful existence, by referring to those who spend their time and energy in search for a cure of a disease, or those who struggle against injustice in society (2003, p. 4). Moreover, some individuals identified so strongly with their ideals – the external referents that facilitated their self-transcendence – that they became the living symbols of these ideals, such as Gandhi, Walesa, and Sakharov in the twentieth century.

The tragedy of modernity as developed in this section, thus, consists in the fact that the moral subjectivism that accompanies the buffered self – trying to shut out demands and referents emanating *beyond* the self in its attempt at mastery and autonomy – renders traditional, pre-existing horizons of meaning and significance that are revealed to the self as based on illusion and superstition, supressing the sources of meaning that grant significance to individuals, defining themselves meaningfully and existing in a horizon of important questions. Nietzsche, Weber, and Taylor, even though maintaining slightly different perspectives, coherently address this tragic aspect of modernisation that constitutes a problem for man to conceive of himself and the world around him meaningfully, as there is no place for self-transcendence in immanence.

2.3 DISEMBEDDING DISRUPTIVITY

The problem of meaning in modernity becomes not only more prominent through the processes of disenchantment, secularisation, and rationalisation as described above, but also more concretely manifests itself through the force of modernisation in different spheres of social existence in contemporary life. As can be deduced form the descriptive analysis of modernisation in the first part of this thesis, the force of modernisation is a dynamic, transformative force that changes everything on its way. Hence, Sheikh defines contemporary

modernisation as Technopolis: "the radical and permanent reorganisation of everything according to the dictates of subjectivity" (2017, p. 187). The constant drive for progress, even though it provides tremendous opportunity, makes *change* not only instrumentally, but also intrinsically valuable for modern man. This modern drive for exponential change, however, uproots the individual, constituting a trauma of disembedding disorientation that is, in its disruptiveness, potentially alienating to the modern individual who stands in the midst of this chaos of change, making it increasingly difficult for him to find a foundation from which to understand the world meaningfully. All that is static is turned over through modern dynamism, evaporating the solid ground that embeds and orientates the individual: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air" (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 12). With the advance of modern technology and the process of informatisation, however, we could add that 'all that is solid melts into the cloud'. This section will further discuss the alienating effects of the disruptive character of the force of modernisation.

2.3.1   Modernisation as Disembedding Force

The restless and transformative character of modernity, constituting a spatiotemporal change, emptying space and time, is a disembedding[17] mechanism, which Giddens defines as "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (1990, p. 21). Even though the transition from the traditional to the modern world is often discussed in terms of differentiation or functional specialisation, Giddens sees these concepts as lacking explanatory power regarding the restructuring of time-space in modernity. The term disembedding captures the fact that social practices are no longer situated, grounded, or embedded in a local context, in which time and space are restricted. The force of modernisation thus increasingly removes social practices from their immediacies of local context and allows them to take place without constraints of time or space.

One of the disembedding mechanisms of modern social institutions that Giddens (1990, p. 22) mentions, is the establishment of expert systems. The enormous impact of

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[17] As with many other processes explained in the context of modernity, disembedding is not an entirely novel phenomenon in modernity. The first forms of disembedding, for example, could be traced back to the invention of writing, where communication becomes 'disembedded' from its specific local and temporal context.

bureaucratisation in modern life has already been touched upon in part one of this thesis, but in the context of disembedding, different light is shed on this process. Bureaucratisation goes hand in hand with what Giddens calls 'expert systems', which he defines as the "systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today" (Giddens, 1990, p. 27). One of the examples that Giddens gives is the fact that everyday millions of people drive a car, even though they have no clue how the car works, nor do they have knowledge about the technicalities of road building, maintaining road surfaces, or the computers that control traffic, yet they drive their cars because they trust the experts and expert systems that created them. Expert systems, thus, are disembedding mechanisms because they provide impersonal 'guarantees' of expectations *across time and space*.

More generally, the disembedding mechanisms of modernisation could be seen as those forces that transform interpersonal to institutional, local to global, particular to abstract, and face-to-face to virtual. Perhaps the aforementioned process of informatisation, intertwined with the rise of communication technologies, constitutes the most visible disembedding force of our era, since they lift out personal relationships from their local and face-to-face character into the virtual world of cyberspace. Instead of being embedded in local context imbued with personal trust in individuals in one's vicinity, through the disembedding force of modernity individuals come to trust abstract and impersonal mechanisms, relating to them "from an outsider perspective as all kinds of expert language from bureaucrats, scientists and coaches penetrate daily life" (Sheikh, 2017, p. 185).

The disembedding force, thus, even though it indeed allows one to drive a car without worrying it will explode or contact anyone in the world at any time, negates the particular and the local, resulting in detachment and uprootedness, because the local, personal context of meaningful interaction becomes increasingly obliterated. The direct contact between individuals and their world becomes detached as they become disembedded. Some thinkers even suggest that, whereas communication technologies like the book and the newspaper stimulated the creation of civil society, contemporary communication technologies, such as smartphones or the internet, could result in a world where people no longer have to meet their neighbours, as they are entertained and informed online, resulting in disembedding and detachment from social life, alienating the modern self from himself and his surroundings (Eriksen, 2014, p. 36).

2.3.2 Tachogenic Alienation

The disembedding force of modernisation becomes even stronger through the pace at which the contemporary world changes. In *Zeitalter der Weltfremdheit,* Marquard (1984/1999) describes that the modern time we live in is characterised by the vision of endless progress; everything changes with increasing pace and in this change, progress is to be found. Central to this modern ideal is the project of mankind being brought to completion by lifting itself out of its predicament. All that used to be becomes surpassed sooner or later: the primitive by the developed, nature by culture, violence by justice, coincidence by science, tribe by state, myth by logos, fiction by reality, suppression by freedom (Marquard, 1984/1999, p. 114). On the other hand, however, the inverse of this ideal of progress is also something inextricably tied up with modern thought: through man's striving for the release from his immaturity, he is alienated and detached, leading to an apocalyptic spiral of decay. In sum, both the utopian vision of progress as well as the fear for catastrophe belong to the modern world. According to Marquard, the paradoxical presence of both of these stances towards the contemporary world finds its origin in the modern phenomenon of tachogenic alienation.

Marquard explains that the modern world is one of tachogenic alienation[18], which entails that the increasing pace at which life changes under the force of modernisation results in an ever-growing estrangement. Firstly, where two thousand years ago a forest was found, thousand years ago there was a field, five hundred years ago there was a house, hundred fifty years ago a weaving mill, seventy-five years ago a railway station, twenty-five years ago an airport, and now there is a satellite terminal. Marquard wishes to show that through scientific and technological developments, all spheres of society are changing exponentially. Consequently, everything that used to be familiar becomes outdated with ever-increasing speed, estranging modern man from his world. Furthermore, empirical science has caused an exploration of new experiences to an extent that the world has not witnessed before. However, these experiences are discovered by others, causing modern man to be reliable on the experience of others: the more scientific the experiences in our world become, the more we have to *believe* in those who tell us about the world (Marquard, 1984/1999, p. 122).

Furthermore, because of the increasing complexity of the world through the exponential change that characterises the modern world, modern individuals need more reductions in complexity in order to cope with reality. Yet, the individuals to whom these reductions in

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[18] From Greek *: to táchos* (speed)

complexity are proposed – the majority of individuals in modern society – are no longer capable of judging these reductions in light of their correspondence with reality, causing the distinction between reality and fiction to fade. This tendency is what Marquard sees as an increasing readiness to accept illusions to have at least something to hold onto in times of tachogenic alienation. Lastly, the increasing pace of change in modern society separates origination and future (*Herkunft und Zukunft*), as less and less experience from the past will be able to serve as a basis for experience in the future; individuals hope for familiarity and embeddedness, but the conditions for their appearance are shattered as everything changes increasingly. However, because our expectations of the future are tainted by tachogenic alienation, the disappointments when confronted with our positive illusions and ideals – such as the ideal of endless progress – do not lead to disillusionment or awakening, but to a negative spiral.

A contemporary thinker who argues in similar lines as Marquard about the pace of modern life and its alienating potential is Hartmut Rosa (2015), who argues that three categories of change are inextricably linked with the acceleration of modern social life: technological acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and acceleration in the pace of life. Rosa considers technological acceleration in terms of technological innovation, but also more broadly in terms of the acceleration of all goal-directed processes, such as transportation, communication, and production. The acceleration in social change is signified by an increased change in institutions and culture, and the acceleration of the pace of life is linked to the fact that interactions between individuals are becoming denser and more condensed. Temporal structures in modernity, therefore, are characterised by an increasing acceleration of processes, events, and the tempo of life. This may be the greatest paradox of this time, since technological advancements were expected to increase leisure time for individuals, because processes like automatization and robotization were supposed to take over many duties normally executed by humans.

Many individuals in contemporary society feel like they are constantly being haunted by time itself. Subsequently, the multidimensional and accelerating rates of change in many domains transform the relationships of human beings as well as the places in which they live, but also their own feelings and convictions. As Rosa points out, the faster these changes accelerate, the "less it is worth the effort of becoming intimately familiar with them and, as it were, "assimilating oneself" to them" (2015, p. 318). Therefore, the more indifferent

individuals become with respect to the content of such relationships, the better they can live up to the demands for acceleration in contemporary society, reinforcing the disembedding force found in modernisation. The 'loss' of depth and authenticity of relationships with others and the world around us is the effect of the acceleration that takes place in all domains, it is the 'pathology of acceleration', which adds to the tachogenic alienation as described by Marquard.

2.3.3   The Discontents of Modernity

The somewhat dark picture of modernisation that has been sketched above is not intended to deny the many domains in which modernisation indeed has proven to be a positive force, equipping man with means to understand the world and build upon it. Rather, this analysis of the discontents of modernity is necessary to come to understand the disembedding and alienating aspects that have come with man's project of becoming like god in creating and making everything *ex nihilo*. In trying to overcome the inevitabilities of the human condition, especially its finitude and fallibility, modern man resembles Icarus who flew too near to the sun, causing him to fall and wake up in the tragedy of modern life as outlined above. Besides the horrors of the twentieth century and the unofficial reintroduction of fate, the tragedy of disembedding disenchantment has unfolded itself, self-incurred by the hubris of modern man of trying to overcome the inevitabilities of his condition, including his ever-present *need* for meaning and significance.

After the neutralisation of the world and the constitution of man's immanence in denying the transcendent and external sources of meaning, modern man pretended there was no longer anything that dictated and defined his character or *telos* in life; man thought he could make himself. Charles Taylor accurately articulates this tendency of modern culture, which "has developed conceptions of individualism which picture the human person as, at least potentially, finding his or her own bearings within, declaring independence from the webs of interlocution which have originally formed him/her, or at least neutralising them" (1989, p. 36). Yet, these pretentions leave man without foundation, without up and down, marking the advent of nihilism and meaninglessness as prophesied by Nietzsche. Modern man ceased to be a being who stood for anything higher or other than himself and became a being who tried to take possession and manipulative control of himself and his surroundings, taking flight in the illusion that increasing change on itself would lead to progress. Yet, the reduction of nature to materialistic, deterministic, and devoid of spirit, inherent to the attitude of mastery through instrumental reason and control, empties the lived, experience-based, natural world of moral

significance and meaning. The disembedded, buffered self, arising in these conditions of immanence, has a profound problem of meaninglessness and the fading of his moral horizon, as his pretention of autonomously and independently choosing his sources of significance and meaning is self-defeating. However, this account of the discontents of modernisation need not and should not lead to despair, nostalgia, or apocalyptic visions of the future, denying the positive force of modernisation that endowed the world with technological, economic, scientific, and political miracles that were heretofore unthinkable. Rather, as will be the project in the next part of this thesis, we will see how new light can be shed on the potentialities present in the modern world for finding meaning and significance, whilst embracing the transformative energy of the force of modernisation.

PART THREE

THE QUEST FOR MEANING IN THE MODERN WORLD

Most commonly, when confronted with the discontents of modernity as presented in the foregoing part, individuals automatically find themselves siding with one of two camps: they either identify with the knockers or with the boosters of modernity. The knockers of modernity are generally those who, overwhelmed by the malaises of modern life and the deep feeling of loss, nostalgia, and *Sehnsucht*, long back to times when they assume things must have been better. Disenchanted, modern man, the knockers assert, is nothing more but a cold machine, and by retrieving the past, the knockers hope to re-enchant man. Not only does a stance like that result in a glorification of the past, – hindering future-oriented visions from being developed while questionably assuming that the processes of modernisation are reversible – it is also a perspective on reality that denies the tremendous force of modernisation that has transformed Europe throughout modernity. On the other hand, however, the boosters of modernity often assert that the only reason modernisation came with its discontents is because individuals remained captivated by the age-old myths and traditions that held them from flourishing and left them in superstition and ignorance; all that modern man needs is more disenchantment and enlightenment. For the boosters, therefore, the only reason the vision of modernisation has not yet been wholly actualised is because not *enough* has changed, resulting in the view that man has not broken all the chains that have been holding him from reaching the sun. Yet, as we have seen, such a stance is based on erroneous presumptions, as most of the aforementioned discontents are caused by the deeply disenchanting and uprooting character of tachogenic change.

As will be argued in this part, neither of these positions in the discussion at hand will prove to be fruitful in light of the disembedding character of the force of modernisation, and the consequential problem of meaninglessness. Combined, however, the two stances above do provide one truth about contemporary man: *He finds himself in an enchanted and disenchanted condition at the same time.* Even though it is true that the disenchanting process of modernisation created a 'buffered' self that is *less* vulnerable to the forces of nature and subsequently has the ability to increasingly shape his surroundings according to his desire, it is imperative to note that the conception of oneself as modern is *only* possible from the basis of the porous, enchanted, pre-modern self. Disenchanted, modern man indeed employs disengaged, instrumental reason to build upon the earth, but as Weber asserted, this analytic and rational stance *by itself* cannot provide for awareness of the meaning of the world or the deepest values that are inextricably tied to this awareness: The buffer could not exist if it were not enveloping that what it is buffering. It is this primordial nexus of human beings, albeit

enveloped by a buffer, that provides a dialectical counterforce against the uprooting and disembedding character of modernisation. This last part will form an account of how we may understand this condition of 'disenchanted enchantment', which finds its roots in the structures of the nonmodern self and remains present in the inner depths of modern man, to see how contemporary man can still be attuned to the sources of meaning that embed him and make his life worth living despite its tragic character.

3.1 THE MODERN SELF ATTUNED

3.1.1 The Primary Sphere of Embeddedness and Enchantment

The disenchanted modern world and the modern buffered self necessarily rest on, or are deeply rooted in, the fundamental and pre-conditional sphere of the preceding world and its porous self. In the words of Sheikh: "The ontology of modern philosophy, from Descartes to Nietzsche, 'jumped over' a more primary sphere that precedes the technopolitical [modern] world and in which it rests" (2017, p. 208). It is this primary sphere of human being, notwithstanding the disenchanting processes of modernisation, that has the power of embedding the individual through providing it with significance and meaning, made possible by the fact that "human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life" (Taylor, 2007, p. 638). The sense that there is 'something more' is experienced by great numbers of individuals, especially in moments of reflection about their life, in moments of being amazed by the beauty of nature, or in moments of grief and loss: "Our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief" (Taylor, 2007, p. 727).

This elucidates why modernisation, as well as its disenchanting and disembedding aspects, is a *force* that instigates a process, it is the force that 'lifts out', but it would not be able to count as a force without something that this force is aimed at, which we can find in the embedding force of the pre-modern, porous self which precedes it. Thus, the modern individual, even though deeply affected by the disenchanting mechanisms of modernisation, has not completely 'lost' its magic, as presupposed by Taylor's assertion above that humans can respond to something *beyond* themselves, meaning that "enchantment…is part of our normal condition, and far from having fled with the rise of science, it continues to exist (though often unrecognized)…where neither science nor practical knowledge seem of much utility" (Schneider, 1993, p. x).

The modern individual, composed of a human, nonmodern nexus around which the 'buffer of modernity' has developed, is because of his buffered condition not situated in an enchanted world of demons, magic, and all sorts of spirits. Rather, we should interpret the modern condition of 'disenchanted enchantment' as undermining the illusion that humans are sovereign makers and creators of themselves as well as the values and meanings that direct their life; there is an enchantment about (modern) life that is not graspable nor manipulable by human beings. The modern condition of 'disenchanted enchantment' shows that humans are self-reflexive beings that are nonetheless never fully transparent to themselves or to others, and neither is the world transparent to them. The enchanted aspect of the condition of disenchanted enchantment in which modern man finds himself, is accurately expressed by Richard Jenkins:

"Enchantment conjures up, and is rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable; in which the philosophies and principles of Reason or rationality cannot by definition dream of the totality of life; in which the quotidian norms and routines of linear time and space are only part of the story; and in which the collective sum of sociability and belonging is elusively greater than its individual parts" (2000, p. 29).

As Jenkins further explains this definition is loose and somewhat ambiguous deliberately, as anything more explicit would disenchant the issue at hand, leaving no possibility of a meaningful understanding of the term. Understanding this enchanted aspect of modern man, albeit disenchanted to a certain extent, sheds new light on modern man's quest for meaning, because the conception of the modern individual as buffered yet porous, opens up the possibility for him to seek and point to referents *outside* of himself, signifying something that evades and escapes his grasp of immanence. These referents outside himself that man signifies, establish a link with values, ideals, and ideals that allow one to assert that existence is worth living despite the fact that it is imbued with tragedy and suffering; it allows one to assert that life is significant and meaningful. Subsequently, the modern individual, by responding to the call of responsibility that these external referents invoke, becomes embedded in existence, because life is not related to from a disengaged, third-person perspective, but rather lived as experience within a greater meaningful horizon.

3.1.2   Being-in-the-World: Embeddedness and Attunement

It is thus from *being in* the world, rather than from taking a disembedding reflexive or calculative perspective, that the individual becomes embedded. This embedded way of relating to the world thus *precedes* viewing the world from a Cartesian subject-object distinction,

which, as we have seen, is a mental activity that neutralises the world and makes possible to conceive of it as nothing more than the raw material which mankind can manipulate and build upon for its own benefit. The embedded way of relating to the world therefore shows us a fundamental fact about human perception, that is perhaps overlooked by many moderns: "we perceive meaningful phenomena, not the objective world" (Peterson, 2013, p. 17). This intuition that Peterson describes, has been famously described by Heidegger, who explains in *Being and Time* that our relation to 'objects' is mostly fully integrated and immersed in *goal-directed* activities. When a carpenter uses a hammer, for example, he has no conscious experience or recognition of the hammer as an independent and examinable object (*vorhanden*), but rather the hammer is part of the meaningful and goal-directed project that the carpenter is involved in (*zuhanden*) (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). This is not only true for the hammer as object, but even for the carpenter himself, as he becomes so absorbed in his activity that he has no awareness of himself; at least not in the form of the distinction between subject and object. Only when the hammer breaks, the carpenter will stand back and consciously see the hammer as object, to examine what causes its malfunctioning.

The example above serves to illustrate that our most basic mode of being and relating to the world is not characterised by categories and distinctions of subject and object, but rather by meaningful engagement. Relating to the way from an engaged and embedded perspective closely resembles the way Heidegger writes of Dasein as Being-in-the-world:

"Being-in is not a 'property' which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and without which it could just be just as well as it could be with it. It is not the case that man 'is' and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the 'world'—a world with which he provides himself occasionally. Dasein is never 'proximally' an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a 'relationship' towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only because Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is. This state of Being does not arise just because some entity is present-at-hand outside of Dasein and meets up with it. Such an entity can 'meet up with' Dasein only in so far as it can, of its own accord, show itself within a world." (1962, p. 84)

To be, therefore, is to be there, there in the world, embedded and immersed in the world that is experienced by the individual; man's identity is inextricably tied up with his day-to-day being in the world. However, as becomes clear from the quote above, Heidegger is not simply referring to a spatial relationship with the world or objects in the world. The essence of being-in-the-world is not the fact that we live in the world of objects, but rather it refers to the

experience of the world from *within* being in the world. The meaning of the being of something, be it our surroundings, ideas, or others, is thus *not* primarily or principally understood from a detached analytical gaze, but rather from the way it emerges in the context of our day-to-day engagements with it from a meaningful life context: "all relations of mental states to their objects *presuppose* [emphasis added] a more basic form of being-with-things which does not involve mental activity" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 52). This embedded form of understanding, therefore, is not something that is conscious and intentional, as a mental activity that attempts to *grasp* the essence of something in a rational, disengaged manner, but rather it is an unconscious process in which the meaningful relations that make up our world are interpreted.[19] Accordingly, the primacy of *Dasein* as a way of relating to the world, as well as the fact that the disengaged and disembedded, reflexive view presupposes – and is preceded by – the embedded way of relating to the world from being-in-the-world, points at its historical parallel as found in the description of the porous and buffered self, where the former constitutes the pre-condition for the latter.

The embedded self, thus, does not stand *against* the 'objective' world, creating subjective values himself, but he finds meaning and value from being in the world. This relationship to the world is therefore one of attunement[20] (*Stimmung*): "Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of affectedness" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 176). Our attunement to the world is therefore how we are in the world, it constitutes its very accessibility, and with that it is also *constitutive of human existence itself*. At the same time, it is important to note that attunement is not intentional; it is not a reaction to the world that we choose or initiate. Rather, because we are affective (*Befindlich*), we find ourselves in "a situation where things and options already matter" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 168). The quest for meaning, thus, does not start with a mental activity or any other active stance; it is our very nature to be attuned in a complex world of meaningful relations and encounters. In being, thus, we are already affected, and the embedded self becomes attuned through this process.

As we have seen, the disembedding force that lifts the modern individual out of the 'constraints' of his embeddedness constitutes a rise in power, as the reflexive, disembedded

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[19] This very fact also means that empirical and/or scientific perspectives on reality are fundamentally rooted in Dasein's non-scientific perspective: "Something like nature can be discovered only because there is history, because Dasein is itself the primarily historical being. And only because of this there are natural sciences" (Heidegger, 1985, p. 258). In other words, even scientists dwell while they practice science.

[20] In some situations *Stimmung* is translated as 'mood', but this is too narrow a translation as 'attunement' includes all of Dasein's *affective* states, including emotions and passions (Dreyfus, 1991).

stance goes hand in hand with a manipulative approach to the world. The modern individual increasingly comes to see himself as a neutral and autonomous force of manipulation, building upon the neutralised world by instrumental rationality, scientific explicability, and technological mastery. For the disembedded individual, therefore, the way of relating to reality is much more centred on control and utilisation, making his stance manipulative, rather than appreciative: "he sees in what surrounds him things to be handled, forces to be managed, objects to be put to use" (Heschel, 1965, p. 82). The embedded way of relating to the world, however, is radically different since it is predicated on the deep bond between the individual and his surroundings in which he is deeply rooted. This stance, therefore, opens up the way for modern man to be deeper and more meaningfully engaged, as "he sees in what surrounds him things to be acknowledged, understood, valued or admired" (Heschel, 1965, p. 82). Accordingly, whereas the disembedded individual takes a manipulative stance towards the world, alienating him from his own life world, the embedded individual can take an appreciative stance that can furnish significant being and meaningful interaction.

3.1.3   The Spatiotemporal Character of the Embedded Self

As we have seen, the force of modernisation instigates a neutralised spatiotemporal character, which means time and space are 'emptied'. The embedded character of time and space, however, is different as it is 'full' in the sense that it is part of an inherently meaningful structure. To understand the embedded character of time and space, we need to understand its inextricable relation to being-in-the-world, a relation that is accurately represented by the term *dwelling*, a term used both by Heidegger and Michael Polanyi. When dwelling, something is no longer an object for us, but we come to inhabit it; it becomes part of us and permeates our relation to other objects in the world (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 45). In other words, dwelling is the way of being-in-the-world as expressed in Dasein. Dwelling, therefore, is inextricably tied up with a sense of belonging, familiarity, and embeddedness, since to dwell is to be at home, to have a place, but at the same time it denotes a sense of 'looking after' and 'taking care' (Malpas, 2006, p. 75). Again, important to note is that dwelling is understood not as something in which Dasein may or may not engage; it characterises Dasein's very being, *since for Dasein to 'be' is to dwell*. Dwelling, like the embeddedness of the porous self, is always tied to a certain space and place, the relation to things associated with dwelling is a relation of attentiveness, rootedness, and homeliness.

Dwelling, thus, cannot be approached separately from being-in-the-world, but there is also a connection between embedded spatiality and the intersubjective or social; the

embeddedness of being-in-the-world does not exist without being-with-others (*Mitsein*). Heidegger sheds light on this aspect of dwelling in the following passage:

"When . . . we walk along the edge of a field but "outside" it, the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth. The boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a "boat which is strange to us," it is still indicative of Others" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 118)

Thus, the realm of embeddedness is one where we are involved with others as well as with places and things, not as neutral entities against which we stand, but as parts of a meaningful framework which we are attuned to: "while our involvement with things…is also an involvement with others, our involvement with others is also an involvement with things" (Malpas, 2006, p. 87). In other words, the meaningful ordering of the social is at the same time a spatial ordering, showing that things bear reference to each other when they are incorporated into a meaningful whole.

As Sheikh (2017, p. 224) explains, the character of space in its attuned and embedded form is *spherical*, a term he uses after Sloterdijk. 'Sphere' refers to the roundness that people inhabit, developed and shared by individuals, which makes them feel homely or natural. The sphere is thus the way something is transformed from an object, for example a house, into something that does not have the character of an object but rather is incorporated in our being. This is how a house can become a home; it becomes a sphere when we circle around it and become attuned to it (Sheikh, 2017, p. 227). Things thus receive depth if the human capacity for seeking meaning and significance comes into close contact with it, which happens when we *dwell* instead of having a confrontational stance, when we circle around it, so that it becomes a sphere of attunement and embeddedness.

Lastly, the temporal character of the embedded self, intertwined with its spatial character, is rhythmical (Sheikh, 2017, p. 228). As we have seen, modernisation, under the spread of the mechanical clock, among other imperative developments, has instigated 'empty' time by quantifying it in measurable units, with the ultimate objective of maximisation. Rhythmical time, however, embeds, as it gives time to focus on patterns, organising the flow of time rhythmically. Instead of the experience of chaos of impressions which cannot be incorporated into a meaningful whole, therefore, embedded time allows for attunement: rhythm slows down and opens up space for attunement and dwelling. In the world of embeddedness, where one

dwells in a realm of significant existence, the world is experienced from being-in-the-world, allowing for a profound attunement to the natural, meaningful order in which everything, from things, to people, space, and time, has its place. Being in the world where this totality of meaningful relations surrounds us, we as humans cannot but *interpret* these structures that determine the deepest ontological level of how we perceive the world. Therefore, in the next section the relation between embeddedness and meaning will be approached from a hermeneutic perspective, that is, from a perspective of the art of interpretation.

3.2 HERMENEUTICS OF EMBEDDEDNESS

The fact that the embedded self does not stand against the objective world, but *finds* meaning from dwelling in the world, means that interpretation is essential in the quest for meaning. Whereas, throughout the past hermeneutics has mainly been associated with the interpretation of myths, religious scriptures, or legal texts, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the discipline of hermeneutics became expanded from the interpretation of textual principles to the interpretation of human understanding in general, marking the advent of philosophical hermeneutics. This broadening of the field of hermeneutics was most significantly advocated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, the 'father of modern hermeneutics' (Zimmermann, 2015).

Schleiermacher, followed by William Dilthey, addressed the inadequacy of understanding human phenomena from a rationalistic perspective, preparing the way to move from a dominantly epistemological explanation (*Erklären*) towards an ontological understanding (*Verstehen*) in the human sciences, ultimately depending on the nature of reality and the beings we are, rather than a rigid methodology or a set of rules (McManus Holroyd, 2007).[21] Accordingly, modern hermeneutics reveals how human interpretation of experience is based on a circular movement between part and whole; the hermeneutic circle. The understanding of reality from within being-in-the-world depends heavily on the nature of reality and the ontology of human beings, rather than a set of formal rules. This section will expand on the hermeneutic understanding of the human propensity to incorporate lived experience in a greater meaningful whole.

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[21] Dilthey employs these two concepts to distinguish the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) from humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Whereas the latter involves understanding as *Verstehen*; an embedded, hermeneutic understanding linked to lived experience, where something is understood in the context of the whole, *Erklären* refers to the objectifying third-person perspective of *explanation* that is prevalent in the natural sciences (Dilthey, 1989)

3.2.1 Philosophical Hermeneutics: Man as Self-Interpreting Animal

Human beings, thus, do not perceive the world as a set of objects, but rather as a set of meaningful phenomena: "the world…manifests itself to us, as religious thinkers and philosophers alike have insisted, in the form of *meaning*" (Peterson, 2013, p. 18). Hermeneutics as art of interpretation, therefore, sheds light on the way human beings interpret and incorporate these phenomena into a meaningful whole. The world presents itself as a sea of complexity, and the human capacity for sense making allows for the hermeneutic transformation of chaos into order. Subsequently, hermeneutic philosophers, including Husserl, Dilthey, and Gadamer, have rejected the modern concept of objectivity, which asserts that the human mind disengages from history to find an objective explanation of reality. Rather, human beings approach the world from a constant back-and-forth movement between new experiences and their incorporation into a meaningful whole: man is a self-interpreting animal (Taylor, 1985, p. 45). Our interpretations of ourselves and our experiences are not merely a view of reality, or subjective epiphenomena; they are constitutive of who we are. Nonetheless, hermeneutics, unlike scientific or empirical approaches to reality, is not concerned with developing an objective procedure or method of understanding, but rather its purpose is to clarify the human conditions that can lead to understanding and meaning (McManus Holroyd, 2007). The reason that the understanding of hermeneutic approaches must be different from scientific explanations that involve physical nature, is because in dealing with man's interpretive capacity, the object of interpretation is at the same time a subject capable of interpretations of his own. Hence, to shed light on the nature of human understanding, one needs a different approach, one that may be found in hermeneutics.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, following Dilthey and Heidegger, asserted that human beings have a historically affected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), which means that they are embedded in a particular history, culture, language, personal previous experience, and tradition that shape their understanding of the world, and this embeddedness forms a basis for understanding. This embeddedness, at the same time, points at the situatedness of human understanding: "the very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 312). Therefore, knowledge, as Zimmermann (2015) elucidates following Gadamer, is not something that we acquire and control as a possession, but it is something in which we already *participate*; it is inextricably tied to the embodied experience of being in the world. Yet, our situatedness also entails that our situation, with regard to the tradition that we participate in, can never be

fully illuminated; not due to a deficiency in reflection or hermeneutic capacities, but due to the essence of the historical and finite beings that we are. As Gadamer states: "to be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (1960/1989, p. 313). Man's finitude, *vita brevis*, results in an inability to distance himself from his situatedness to examine the true and absolute reality that underlies human existence.

Historical consciousness sheds light on the incompleteness of the narrative of endless progress that boosters of modernity like to promote: not all that used to be becomes surpassed through modernisation. On the contrary, an underestimated share of our *being* remains fundamentally unaltered because of the fact that we stand in the stream of time that connects past and present. This vital continuity in historical consciousness, even though underestimated by those asserting the superiority of the 'objectivity' acquired through modern scientific inquiry, is articulated by Flood, who writes that "although Augustine inhabits a Neoplatonist influenced Christian world – so far away from our own world – nevertheless, we can recognize and identify with his thoughts and struggles. We recognize something of our own life in his, even though in late modernity we have lost his deeply cosmological sense of the self" (2013, p. xvi). The fact, thus, that we can recognise ourselves in those that lived centuries before our own means that historical consciousness undergirds our way of relating to the world.

Significant in understanding the hermeneutic approach towards being is the concept of 'horizon'. Using Husserl's phenomenological concept of 'horizon', Gadamer asserts that "the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 313). The horizon thus represents the situatedness or particular standpoint (worldview) of human beings in the world. The horizon, however, is not static or limited to a singular position from which the self-interpreting animal understands his experiences, but rather it is something in which we dwell and that dwells within us. Our horizon in the present is continually in a dynamic process of being formed, because we continually encounter novel or alien experiences that we interpret on this horizon, gaining understanding through the integration of experience into a meaningful framework: the 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*). The possibility of the fusion and broadening of our horizon means that our horizon does not imprison us; it can shift, expand, and provide the basis from which we can understand the world. The possibility of fusion of horizons furthermore points at the inter-subjective nature of the horizon, which means one's horizon is the foundation for meaning, based in a social dialogue embedded in community. It is through

this fusion of horizons that we create order in an inherently chaotic and complex world, and as Peterson (2013, p. 43) asserts, it is on walking this border between chaos and order, Yin and Yang, that life is imbued with meaning and purpose.

3.2.2   Horizon of Hyper-Goods

Our horizon not only serves as the basis of understanding life from within, but it also, and perhaps even more so, essential in the development of a meaningful personal identity. As Taylor explains, however, one of the things we cannot do if we are to define ourselves significantly, "is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us" (1991, p. 37), as that would signify the self-defeating move that Taylor sees frequently being carried out in "our subjectivist civilization". As human beings, thus, we can only develop a meaningful personal identity by dwelling in a horizon that *surpasses* our own individual particularity or freedom of choice; to live a meaningful and *significant* life, is to be a sign of something greater than and beyond oneself. Therefore, conceptions of the good that guide our actions and purposes are not a matter of choice, but rather a matter of conviction. These convictions of the horizon of the good are essential for the self-interpreting being that man is, since to have an identity is to be oriented in moral space, to have a horizon that points at the incomparably higher (Taylor, 1989, p. 47). What I am, my identity, is crucially decided by that which is most significant to me.

A meaningful horizon thus requires the presence of 'hypergoods', which are those goods "which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about" (Taylor, 1989, p. 63). However, a horizon of hypergoods is not an individual affair since it must be embedded in a commonly shared moral horizon. True significance and meaning is only found in something beyond the self, it is found in a commonly shared horizon that connects one with a larger whole. The (moral) horizon of human beings and the hypergoods that it contains allow for 'strong evaluation', which entails the "discriminations of right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower" (Taylor, 1989, p. 4). These strong evaluations, however, are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather they stand independent of these and offer the ground on which they can be judged. Thus, a subjectivist account of the self, solely concerned with its own sovereignty, autonomy, and choice of the good cannot account for the good and the meaningful; it is only through dialogue and connection with one's larger horizon in which he is situated, that one can interpret himself as dwelling in a meaningful existence.

The distance between oneself and his horizon of hypergoods, however, is inevitable, but at the same time this distance establishes a responsibility, a responsibility of embracing the hypergood in the form of a project, a philosophy, or a God, to thereby "steal a small piece of its immortality" (Delsol, 2003, p. 6). These hypergoods that guide the actions and goals of human beings, subsequently, are a system of values engrained in our common cultural horizon. These fundamental values, however, are not *conclusions* derived from facts or rational thought, they are premises or first principles that allow individuals to make qualitative distinctions in their life (Spruyt, 2003, p. 162). It is by dwelling in the common cultural horizon, while being able to criticise and build upon it, that man is embedded in a context of moral and cultural significance.

3.2.3 The Quest for Meaning in Light of Constitutive Homelessness

As philosopher and sociologist Plessner (1980-85, p. 385) explains, a fundamental property of human existence is its constitutive homelessness (*Konstitutive Heimatlosigkeit*), which means that the 'home' which man builds in the form of his cultural horizon will always and necessarily be impermanent. Indeed, even though it may seem at one moment that life makes sense and that we are 'in place' and feel at home at a given time and place, this feeling inevitably will soon or later make place for renewed, uninterpreted chaos, unanswered questions, and anguish. Consequently, meaningfulness or 'fulfilment' is never a permanent state. The constitutive homelessness of man emphasises the hermeneutic insight of man's finitude and fallibility, followed by his predicament of never being able to arrive at a true or absolute conception of the world and its truths, a final state of fulfilment. Each interpretation of reality inevitably departs from a seriously limited horizon of experience, and it is only through experience and the fusion of horizons, that man can dwell in his existence and resume his quest for a home. Consequently, the inevitabilities of human being "condemns us to an eternal quest for a new home" (Van Oosten, 2014, p. 238). Because of the aforementioned inevitable irreconcilability of man's existence and its referents, the quest for significance and meaning – the quest for a home – is necessarily a never-ending pilgrimage.

Yet, this fundamental property of human existence, and the unease of homelessness that comes with it, does not amount to nihilism nor does it necessarily invite to an abandonment of its quest. As Delsol writes, "paradoxically, existence actually finds true happiness in the anxiety of unresolved questions, and suffocates in the identification of itself with the object of its expectations" (Delsol, 2003, p. 9). It is disquietness paired with hope that has been de

driving force of the great cultures that advanced and of the development of man himself. Utopias, for example, are those good places (*eu-topos*) where man has arrived home at last, but at the same time this place that has no place (*ou-topos*), is one where man is distraught and deprived of his history as well as his unique capacity for hope. Guided by and rooted in his horizon that articulates those goods that are incomparably higher, mankind can therefore nourish the hope that comes together with the new possibilities formed by culture, establishing the conditions for man's historically ongoing self-interpretation and self-realisation. Subsequently, as Delsol (2008, p. 71) asserts, the thinking and self-interpreting species of mankind is destined to tragedy, in the sense that the questions it eternally poses, will never find a definitive answer. Yet, only in the quest for answers to the tragic existence of life, only in dwelling in attunement to the world and those that dwell in the world with us, meaning and significance is to be found.

3.3 HORIZONS OF MEANING: TRADITION, MYTH, AND NARRATIVITY

Through the force of modernisation, and in particular its Enlightenment-inspired aspects, the imperative role of the intellect and the human capacity for instrumental reason in releasing mankind from its *Unmündigkeit* has been emphasised, and even though these human capacities have unquestionably allowed modern man to advance scientifically and technologically, they do not by themselves provide an opening for moral improvement or the discrimination of the incomparably higher. Yet, in its emphasis on these disembedding aspects of modernisation, modern thought has made the great mistake of "assuming that the world of spirit described by those who preceded us was the modern world of matter, primitively conceptualised" (Peterson, 1999, p. 20). In modern man's quest for meaning, therefore, it is essential to realise that these two worlds, the 'objective' world of rational and scientific inquiry and the 'world of value' that forms its precondition as the world in which we dwell meaningfully, are, even though distinct and to a certain degree at odds with each other, not incompatible.

For modern man to resume his quest for meaning, therefore, it is imperative to understand that the structures of tradition, of which myth and narrative are fundamental aspects, are not a prison of superstition and *Unmündigkeit*, but rather form the common cultural horizon that makes our meaningful engagement with the world possible to begin with. The hermeneutic approach towards the embedded self as expanded upon in the previous section, therefore, serves as a basis for the account of tradition, myth, and narrative in this section, especially with regards to the insight that our meaningful being in the world is not characterised by

objectivity and disengagement, but rather by dwelling, involvement, and attunement to our historically affected horizon of interpretation. Because we are involuntary conservative beings and as our horizon of interpretation is necessarily historically affected, we have the capability of approaching the world, firmly rooted in a basis of tacit understanding that was handed over to us through the traditions, myths, and narratives that shape the human way of being in the world ontologically.

3.3.1 Persisting Tradition as Source of Meaning

Traditions provide a stable horizon of meaning as they provide the basis from which we interpret the chaotic world around us, integrating it into a meaningful whole. Thus, whereas on one hand tradition indeed points at the conservation of meanings, institutions, and practices through the transmission of common cultural horizons, on the other hand tradition is the very condition for innovation, as every innovation puts forward new meanings *from within* a web of already preserved meanings (Schuback, 2011, p. 63). As emphasised before our situatedness of our being-in-the-world make it possible for us to interpret the world around us as well as ourselves, meaning that the relevance of tradition is not something that can be denied or overcome; we are truly conservative involuntarily. This does, however, not mean that one must blindly follow what traditions stand for; on the contrary one can adopt those premises that are fruitful whilst leaving those behind that are detrimental. This is an insight that is accurately articulated by Zimmermann: "There is nothing wrong with wanting to think *for* oneself, as long as we don't fall prey to the illusion that we could actually think *by* ourselves, in isolation from the traditions and authorities that guide our thinking" (2015, p. 44). Therefore, by condemning tradition altogether on basis of its supposed superstition is self-defeating, as that would cause an existential crisis since it would undermine the stable horizon from which one can interpret the world as well as himself. Modern man in search of meaning, therefore, needs tradition to guide him on his quest; only from within the world of historical consciousness it is possible to conceive of the world.

As Shuback (2011, p. 66) emphasises, tradition itself forms the world of meanings that have preceded us, giving each individual an already-understood and pre-interpreted world: tradition is *ontological involvement*, as it is being in a world of meaning. Without it we would suffocate, as our situatedness points at the impossibility of finding a position free from already existing meanings from which to conceive of meaning. This also means that, contrary to the common view of modernisation as going from tradition to modernity, tradition itself does not and cannot disappear, but it persists in modern society (Sheikh, 2017, p. 289). This persistence

sheds light on the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernisation; *they are two poles that shape modern life*. Whereas tradition as a 'world of value' provides embeddedness and meaning, modernisation as an 'objective' world provides the energy that makes scientific and technological advancement possible. As Sheikh (2017, p. 291) explains, however, the horizon of tradition does not remain untouched by the force of modernisation, as traditional activities are lifted out of their original context, but tradition does survive through the persistence of this inner ethos, providing modern man with a meaningful horizon. This is the paradoxical world that modern man finds himself in: the world of disenchanted enchantment.

3.3.2 Narrare Necesse Est

The necessity of seeing tradition and modernisation as dialectically related is rooted in the fact that the modern rationalistic and scientific approach to reality may answer questions about means, calculability, and efficiency, but the questions about ultimate ends, about the *meaning* of things, and about those things that are incomparably higher, cannot be answered by this approach. The latter type of questions does not have straightforward answers, but rather insight regarding the answers to these questions is gained in the tacit background of our common cultural horizon, which is handed over and shared in narrative form:

"The automatic attribution of meaning to things – or the failure to distinguish between them initially – is a characteristic of narrative, of myth, not of scientific thought. Narrative accurately captures the nature of raw experience. Things *are* scary, people *are* irritating, events *are* promising, food *is* satisfying, at least in terms of our basic experience" (Peterson, 1999, p. 16).

Some moderns may indeed proclaim that they are not in need of myth in coping with life, having surpassed the pre-modern domain of the enchanted and entered the realm of the objective and rational. Yet, these proclamations testify of an unawareness of the depth of human beings that lies *beyond* their modern buffer. Even moderns are porous in the sense that they can be *affected*, finding themselves in a situation where things and options already matter. As Peterson (1999, p. 16) explains, the modern mind is still endlessly capable of 'irrational' (motivated) reactions: We fall under the spell of experience whenever we attribute emotions such as frustration, aggression, devotion, or lust to the person or situation that exists as the proximal cause of such agitation. It is this porousness and affectedness that sheds light on the conditions of meaning and it is exactly this openness that forms the conditions wherein meaning can be derived in modern times.

The reason that narrative, myth, and tradition persist even in the modern world is because the mythical technique, the telling of stories, the handing over of wisdom from generation to generation, is the "art of bringing available truth within the reach of what we are equipped to handle in life" (Marquard, 1989, p. 90). Whereas knowledge can contribute to truth cognitively, we need narrative to be able to live with the truth: "knowledge is not mythology's grave but its cradle" (Marquard, 1989, p. 91). This is why Marquard asserts that we cannot live without myths: *narrare necesse est* (to narrate is necessary). We need tradition, myth, and narrative as solid ground to stand on, a solid ground that does not melt into air but embeds us and gives us orientation and meaning.

However, the particular narrative of modernity that tells us that every story has been renounced as the world has been demystified and objectified through the rise of modern science, implies that the world has been demythologised, instigating a state of storylessness (Marquard, 1989, p. 96). Yet, as Marquard explains, this storylessness of the modern world of objectivity is a loss that cannot be borne: "that is why the modern world did not overcome myths and stories, but in fact only created a story deficit: an empty position, a vacancy" (Marquard, 1989, p. 96). In other words, by proclaiming God dead, a new myth had to be found, a myth that would ensure modern man to be capable of living with the truth. And indeed, the vacancy was soon filled by the post-monotheistic monomyth of modernisation; the myth of the termination of myth, the myth of endless human progress without need of embeddedness in the myths that had preceded him. Yet, as explained above, this monomyth was shattered in an unofficial refatalisation of the world, as man proved to be incapable of eradicating the inevitabilities of his condition, including his fallibility, his mortality, as well as his involuntary conservatism.

Modern man in his quest for meaning, therefore, should come to see that the modern monomyth of endless progress through man's release from his self-incurred immaturity is not capable of giving him meaningful existence *on its own*. Indeed, the mythical, narrative perspective of the world cannot be qualified as describing reality in material or empirical terms. Nonetheless, modern man needs these foundational stories, because without them he will cut himself off from his sources of meaning, purpose, and dignity. From a purely objective and rationalistic point of view, man is an animal "worthy of no more consideration than the opinion and opportunities of the moment dictate" (Peterson, 1999, p. 362). However, from the mythic or enchanted viewpoint, every individual is a unique set of experiences with the ability to bring

something new into being, and it is this capacity for creative action "that makes the tragic conditions of life tolerable, bearable – remarkable, miraculous" (Peterson, 1999, p. 362).

The confusion of empirical fact with moral truth, the failure of seeing the dialectical dynamic between tradition and modernisation as two poles that shape our life, therefore, is what holds modern man from being attuned to his embedding common cultural horizon and the world around him. Without the foundational myths, without the narratives that capture reality in moral terms, and without the traditions that endow individuals with a heritage of pre-existing interpretations and meanings that they can build upon, the rich moral orientation that they provide cannot be preserved. The quest for meaning in the modern world, thus, starts with the realisation that the world of myth, narrative, and enchantment forms a pre-condition and basis of human understanding, dynamically and dialectically related to the world of scientific explicability, technological mastery, and the modern dream of human progress – *narrare necesse est.*

3.3.3   The Continuing Relevance of Tradition in Modern Life

The question now is, what the insight of the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernisation entails for modern man in Western, or more specifically European, context. As expanded upon above, this insight should instil modesty regarding the modern monomythical illusion, the illusion that "we are the culmination of the history of mankind, the fulfilment and the end-product of countless centuries" (Jung, 1933/2014, p. 203). This stance, which can be called 'Enlightenment fundamentalism', does not only result in the *hubris* that brought Icarus to fly too close to the sun; it also undermines the legitimacy and continuing relevance of traditional and mythological explanations of the world which serve as a meaningful pre-condition and pre-understanding for the modern individual. As Smith (1997, p. 11) explains, the stance of Enlightenment fundamentalists involves the view that science and technology are not merely the prevailing form of reason in modern times, succeeding religious and mythic ways of relating to the world chronologically. Rather, they assert that disenchantment and rationalisation, the development of modern cognitive capacities, results in the 'unmasking' of the superstitious mythical and traditional orders of meaning that ground human identity in its pre-mature phases. Even though the Enlightenment fundamentalist may recognise the need for meaning in a chaotic universe, "he refuses to succumb to it, choosing instead to affirm the honour and dignity of the knowing subject" (Smith, 1997, p. 13). Therefore, only by seeing the illusionary character of the hubristic monomythical account of Enlightenment fundamentalists, only by taking a modest stance towards our history and our historical consciousness we can

furnish a meaningful interaction with the world and allow the embedding force of tradition to provide solid ground under our feet.

It is therefore imperative for modern European man to see that his modern identity cannot properly be comprehended nor sustained without reference to its traditional, mythological, and religious foundations in which it is embedded. All Western ethics, including those explicitly formalised in western law, are not rational conclusions drawn from a disengaged perspective of the world, but rather they are predicated upon a mythological common cultural horizon, which specifically attributes divine status to the individual (Peterson, 1999, p. 362). Yet the current attitude to the sources of meaning in Europe, to its common cultural horizon deeply shaped by Christianity, is in profound confusion. As Tom Holland (2008) describes, this attitude is "like that of a once openly gay man who has since barricaded himself inside the closet and taken to sneering at homosexuality as something deviant".[22] Modern man should thus get out of the closet, and affirm that the principles upon which his identity is built are deeply intertwined with his cultural horizon. Without understanding these foundational mythical and religious roots of Western culture and their continuing influence on Western thought, modern man will lack the self-understanding necessary to address his crisis of meaning.

This renewed revaluation for the mythic foundations of our identity, and more specifically the insight that the fundamental tenets of the Judeo-Christian moral tradition continue to provide the basis of understanding in Europe, is by no means a plea for abandoning secularism or reaffirming ecclesiastical authority. In fact, Christianity itself played an important role in the rise of secularism in its Western form. Neither is it a view that necessarily involves a reversal of the disenchantment process, as we have seen that Christianity itself played a central role in the disenchantment process. Rather, the renewed revaluation of this common cultural heritage provides a basis from which we can understand ourselves, our deepest values, and our common cultural horizon. Subsequently, this basis of disenchanted enchantment becomes an embedding force that, in dialectical relationship with the energising and uprooting force of modernisation, can be transformed as to provide a renewed sense of meaningfulness and an opening for progress.

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[22] As Holland adds: Secularism, in its western form, derives ultimately not from Greek philosophy, nor Roman law, nor even from Enlightenment anticlericalism, but rather from teachings and presumptions that are specifically Christian.

CONCLUSION

It has perhaps not been emphasised adequately how the force of modernisation is an immensely energising, dynamic, and transformative force that has proved its potential of radically and permanently reorganising modern society, constituting a sweeping rupture in the conditions of social existence in the modern West, transforming it from a deeply religious, feudal, patriarchal, and unequal society to one with democracy, universal suffrage, education, healthcare, and a constitution guaranteeing inalienable human rights. Moreover, contemporary man, now more than ever, has proven himself capable of progress through the use of instrumental reason, scientific explicability, and especially technological manipulability, which has allowed modern man to expand his knowledge and use it to build upon and improve the world around him. The force of modernisation thus energises man, providing him with a window of opportunity for the future. Instead of humbly accepting a divine plan and awaiting salvation from powers higher than himself, the processes of modernisation have increasingly enthused modern man to affirm and prove his sovereign autonomy as well as his capacities for makeability, constituting his own salvation here and now. And indeed, it seems like modern man is the master of everything around him, from himself to his surroundings, changing his life-world with a dazzling exponential pace. The complete domestication of fate seems to be so close for modern man.

The vision of complete domestication stems from the fact that modern thought revolves around the assertion that human beings are capable of remaking themselves from scratch, that they rebuild the neutralised earth through science and technology, that they can rise their neutral selves out of its predicament of self-incurred immaturity, and that the dream of human makeability does not need historical context as it is predicated on the idea of disengaged, instrumental reason, rather than archaic superstition, myth, or religious piety. In other words, man, instead of God, came to see himself as creator of himself, his surroundings, and history itself; he came to be the centre, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of the world. Yet, in his flight towards the sun, in his attempt of overcoming the inevitabilities that had always delineated his life from birth to death, modern man was inescapably confronted with his fallibility, finitude, as well as the inevitabilities of his condition that he seemingly had forgotten, resulting in the unofficial refatalisation of his existence. Ironically, the realm of technology of which man thought it would defatalise his world, is precisely the locus of the modern return of tragedy. More profoundly, however, modern man, as Icarus would he have survived the fall,

was in his attempt not only confronted with his lack of omnipotence, which might instil the hope that one day he would be able to reach the sun by means of wings that would not melt, but he was also confronted with his self-incurred problem of meaninglessness.

The deep tragedy of meaninglessness is self-incurred as man purchased the rise in his power with estrangement from the world he inhabits. In trying to rid himself of the inevitabilities of his existence, confining his perception to a purely materialistic, subject-object perspective, he emptied the lived, experience-based, natural world of moral significance and meaning through its disenchantment, reducing it to a deterministic mechanism of material parts or informational fragments, devoid of spirit and meaning. Subsequently, in this attempt at total control and domestication he constituted an immanent frame that has no place for sources of significance and meaning outside of the self. This frame, however, cannot by itself be the fundament of a truly meaningful existence, as meaning is found in sources that are necessarily located outside of the self: to live in *signi*ficance is to be a sign of something incomparably higher than one's individual choices. Moreover, this immanent frame of instrumental rationality, technological manipulability, and scientific explicability has no place for the sources of meaning in the form of a common cultural horizon, deeply rooted in tradition, myth, and narrative, as these sources have been rendered as superstitious and morally decadent in light of man's modern achievements. The buffered self, arising with this frame of immanence, therefore, has a profound problem of meaninglessness, as his moral and traditional horizon fades away, while his fallibility, finitude and lack of omnipotence impede him from being able to live without these sources of meaning and identity, as he needs meaningful structures that allow him to cope with the inescapably tragic character of life.

The guiding question of this thesis, however, is how modern man can still face the challenge of creating a meaningful order in light of these tachogenically disruptive and disenchanting processes of modernisation. Within the chaos of exponential growth, rapid technological advancement, and increasing societal change, individuals are undeniably in dire need of the assurance and significance that the embeddedness of their porous predecessors used to provide. As put forth in the third part of this thesis, the modern path towards meaningful existence is not necessarily to be found in a nostalgic return to pre-modern ways of relating to the world, but rather it is to be found in the way of relating to the world from within being-in-the-world. This approach reveals that even though modern man is buffered indeed, there is a sphere that *precedes* relating to the world from a disengaged and disembedded perspective, on a historical as well as on an individual level: The disenchanted conception of the self is

necessarily deeply rooted in the fundamental, pre-conditional sphere of the pre-modern, porous self. The modern world, thus, is one of disenchanted enchantment, where sources of meaning, even though less firmly intertwined with man's being in the world, are still very present. Even though outward manifestations of tradition may be altered through the force of modernisation, the significance of tradition remains in an inner ethos, the way of relating to the world from an engaged and embedded perspective: we do not perceive of the world as a set of objects, but rather as a set of meaningful phenomena. Embeddedness, however, does require an openness to forces beyond the immanent realm of human autonomy and makeability, it requires an openness that can accommodate the ineradicable bent of human beings to respond to something beyond themselves. It is thus the embedded self that does not stand *against* the objective world but finds meaning and value from the ontological involvement of being in the world.

As Chakrabarty revealingly states, "the moment we think of the world as disenchanted…we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated" (2000, p. 89). Thus, even though the narrative of the modern world and the buffered self as affected by the disenchanting force of modernisation is a narrative that is true, it is imperative that the narrative of our common history is told in such a way that we also come to see that at the same time we find ourselves in a condition of disenchanted enchantment, where we can still find meaning and significance in existence through attunement. This is not to say, however, that the force of modernisation on the one hand, and the embedding capacity of tradition, myth, and narrative on the other hand, are not at odds with each other. Rather, they are two poles that dialectically affect modern existence, where the force of modernisation has an energising potential, while the persisting relevance of traditional, mythical, and narrative ways of relating to the world has the potential of providing an embedding counter-force, opening up the way for meaningful and significant existence, as well as providing a basis and orientation for the force of modernisation itself. Modern man should thus overcome the hubristic and self-defeating approach towards reality that denounces the legitimacy of the traditional and mythical structures that make meaningful interaction with the world possible in the first place. The modern path towards meaningful existence, therefore, paradoxically finds itself in the dialectical relationship between both poles, and hence also in the acknowledgement of both poles.

Overcoming the perceived incompatibility between these two poles, however, requires the modest affirmation that answering the most fundamental questions in life may be *beyond* the capacity of instrumental reason, and therefore requires us to engage other faculties. From

this follows that the militant creation of oppositions and incompatibilities between reason and faith, between knowledge and belief, between fact and narrative, between a disengaged and embedded stance, between science and myth, between progress and tradition, are in dire need of revision. The porous world of value in which we dwell meaningfully in attunement to our surroundings, and the objective world of rational and scientific inquiry which allows us to build upon the world, are the two worlds in which we live simultaneously, where the former precedes the latter and provides its basis. The world of tradition, myth, and narrative is therefore not the modern world of matter, primitively conceptualised; rather the former provides the fundamental structure in which man – as the involuntary conservative being that he is – can find meaning and value. Modern enchantment is thus rooted in experiences of the world in which the world is *more* than the sum of accountable, visible, and manipulable objects, and it is exactly in those experiences that man is submersed in the fulness of meaningful and significant existence. Discarding the unaccountable world on basis of its supposed superstition or lack of 'objectivity', however, is a self-defeating move as it will necessarily result in the detriment of the basis on which the accountable world is founded.

Perhaps neither of the aforementioned knockers and boosters of modernity will feel compelled to embrace the disenchanted enchantment of the dialectical relation between the force of modernisation and the embedding structures of tradition, myth, and narrative. Yet, an undeniably fruitful starting point of the conversation about the modern quest for meaning would be the deep awareness and mutual acknowledgement of the inevitabilities of the finitude, fallibility, and constitutive homelessness of the condition of man, resulting in an openness that can accommodate a pluralistic and non-monomythic perspective on the matter at hand. Only by adopting this pluralistic perspective – not to be conflated with a relativistic perspective that would delegitimise the basis and legitimacy of every starting point – the detrimental character of monomythical approaches towards reality can make way for a dialectical perspective that does not deny the energising force of modernisation nor refuses to acknowledge the fundamental need for a meaningful and significant horizon that provides embeddedness in the uprooting chaos of modern existence. This embeddedness, however, will inevitably be temporary and transitory as man, even though he builds many temporary homes, will remain constitutively homeless because of his condition. Yet it is in these antinomies and inevitabilities of man's condition that life has value, even if that means his life is a quest without end. Modern man, as the son of Icarus who woke up in astonishment after

his fall, will have to live with these inevitabilities and courageously face the tragedy of life that paradoxically forms its source of meaningfulness:

"He will know that complete fulfilment is beyond his reach: only God is self-sufficient. He will have to live in a world where evil and death are lurking, where uncertainty impertinently provokes reason, and where war is always waiting in the wings of peace. He will know that he is not destined to witness the disappearance of oppression and war in order to one day find rest in his warm and cosy home. He will discover a homeland that has flexible conceptions of justice and liberty. And he will stop cursing this incertitude when he has finally understood that the tragic is a bearer of meaning" (Delsol, 2003, p. 241).

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