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The Age of Contingency

Peter Murphy

I

Moderns do not expect persons to display constancy of purpose or to pursue the sorts of purposes (ends-in-themselves) that can be constantly attended to. Modernity does not speak to its denizens in these terms. What «matters» in modern life is that persons can choose, and re-choose, their purposes and activities. Whether these are trivial pursuits or not, whether the choices are transient or not, is irrelevant from the modern point of view. Persons of good (rational) character are marginalised in Modernity. Of course, moderns must protect themselves from the harms caused by «fly by night» characters (the unreliable, the dishonest, etc.) if only to protect the integrity of modern choice. However, modern institutions do this not via ethical norms but procedurally. Democracy has its electoral procedures, the market its notification procedures, science its experimental procedures, hospitals their supervisory checks, films and recordings their classification, production and copyright rules. These procedures are «rules of the game» that outlaw privileges, rotten boroughs, gerrymanders, cheating, manipulation —anything that interferes with choices people make or that interferes with the (second order) choices people make in response to others' (first order) choices. Abuses and manipulations do occur, of course, but not pervasively. More interestingly, modern societies do not rely on personal character to prevent such abuses. They do not rely on what the Romans called the bona fides of the politician or the broadcaster. They do not rely on ethical norms, whether of a pagan or a religious kind. Even the unscrupulous and aggrandisers can play by the «rules of the game» (most of the time at least). Once, to be a Christian, you needed to act charitably, faithfully; to be a citizen, you had to act liberally (by giving to the public purse, giving your time to serve in public capacities, etc.) or courageously in public. You were what you were via the continuous observance of norms. The Christian, the citizen had to deliberate, to choose how and when to observe norms. They had a «freedom of conscience». But choice (freedom) was not the centre of their existence. They did not pursue the goods of freedom (free inquiry, free market, democratic choice) but rather choices were made in the course of being a good citizen or a good (charitable, caring, concerned) person. Modernity offers a choice-centred, freedom-centred form of existence. Its culture is a culture of contingency.

«The modern person is a contingent person»[1]. This fact conditions all modern ethics. To be modern is to live in a world of contingency. Whatever social structures a modern inhabits, whatever goals they pursue, whatever they read or see, where-ever they travel to, whoever they know or love,

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1 Heller, *A Philosophy of Morals*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 5.

there are always alternatives to those things. Whatever moderns do, they know that they can always do it differently. This is the modern condition. The denizens of Modernity experience an increasing relativisation of world views and morals[2]. Some of them fret about this relativism. They shudder at its nihilistic overtones. Others endorse this relativism. They like the proliferation of ideas, views, opinions, perspectives, values, forms of life, aspirations, language games —the heterogeneity of sittlichkeit[3]. Some of them even like the idea of nihilism. Contingency, as Ágnes Heller points out, is not a philosophical construct. It is the life experience of the modern individual, and it is a vexing, a threatening, but also a promising experience[4]. And it is one of the few experiences that all modern men and women share[5]. At least «[a] contingent person can communicate with all other contingent persons in addressing what they all share: contingency.»[6].

Persons who are contingent have to «choose themselves». The life of the contingent person —the modern person— is not socially predetermined. Moderns are not born into the sort of (traditional) social arrangement where from the moment of birth the person is slotted into a social telos[7]. Instead they are confronted from the earliest of ages with choices, with possibilities, with options. They must prepare themselves for contingencies. Children are asked to speculate from a very young age as to what they would like to be when they grow up. In a traditional world, this would not make sense. In a traditional world children know what they will be as adults. They will be exactly as their rank, their social status, their social strata, their family tradition, determines. In this setting, individual needs can only develop within fixed boundaries[8]. An individual is ascribed —allotted via birth— a certain kind of education, or office, or property (or lack of it), that is to say, first and foremost a certain position (standing, status) in the world —a place in a hierarchical chain. There are norms and obligations, often very specific rules of behaviour, that go along with that position. There are the duties of one's class, or estate, or rank, or sex. There is also a specific kind of respect (honour) due to one's rank. An individual's allotment is more or less a matter of fate. True, an individual can succeed or fail in living up to the norms of their class, their social cluster. Dishonour is a possibility, as is the moral anguish of dis-honour, of being shamed by one's peers or one's superiors for not having fulfilled the code of the class or community into which one is born. Yet the code, and all that it presupposes, is for the most part fixed and inescapable. As Heller remarks, the denizens of the premodern world mobilised vast ideological resources to shield social arrangements against the awareness of contingency[9]. They argued that social arrangements were natural (god-given, etc.); that birth, while itself completely contingent, fixed the fate of persons as rich or poor, high or low, visible or invisible —a fate that would unfold inexorably, that could not essentially be altered or undone by individual effort, ambition, striving, or achievement. The course of fate is irrevocable, immutable. It speaks to an individual's inability to change things, to alter what has been allotted to them[10]. It is a force which tosses the individual this way and that way, and which is manifest in the structure and movement of society[11]. An individual may or may not be destroyed

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2 Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Féher. *The Postmodern Political Condition*. Polity, Oxford, 1988, p. 50.
3 Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Féher. *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 58.
4 Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Féher. *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 57.
5 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 7.
6 Ibid.
7 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 8.
8 *The Power Of Shame*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985, p. 301.
9 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 16.
10 On the nature of fate, see *Renaissance Man*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, chapter 1.
11 *Renaissance Man*, p. 367.

by this fate. In that specific sense, there is some elasticity in the premodern orbit. It is not predetermined at birth whether the «personality» of a particular person will be happy with their fate or whether they will suffer with their fate; it is not fore-ordained how a person will adapt to their fate. Yet, however a person experiences their fate, they cannot alter the hand that society deals them. They cannot, as the saying goes, «make their own fate». It is only via the long process of «modernisation» —the making of Modernity— that individuals come to the awareness that neither social position nor the social principles that define and allot positions are immutable. The servant woman knew that she would not achieve all that she was capable of, because she had been born into service, rather than into the nobility. The modern woman knows that she can aim to achieve all that she is capable of because her position in life is not inexorable. She can «go places», though how far is always uncertain. In going places, she can move from one social milieu to another, from one occupation to another, from one locality to another. She can perhaps «better herself» —or, if not, then see that her daughter will. And this requires, in its turn, the end of the sense that social arrangements —who gets what job and what norms govern it, who can own property and what sort, who gets an education and what type, etc.— are natural.

It was only during the Renaissance, Heller suggests, that such an awareness began to arise[12]. The Renaissance came to the conclusion that fate in the specific guise of fortune could be mastered, at least for a time, by human audacity and determination, by effort and insight. The Renaissance also assumed that not only could individuals rise above their allotted place, but that the very naturalness of social arrangements was entirely doubtful. In a manner quite the obverse of the ancient Stoics, the Renaissance posed the question: how can we speak of a natural law when we can witness the variation of norms between different cities? The broadening of horizons of the Renaissance culminated in an awareness of the contingency of social arrangements. Those arrangements, as Heller suggests, came to be regarded as contingent or accidental as our birth into this or that society or age or stratum. Nothing in our biological constitution or generic endowment predetermines that we should be born into one particular time, society or stratum than another[13]. Likewise, social arrangements can be seen in the same light, that is, as contingent. And where they are viewed in such a light, it will be concluded that any particular social arrangement can just as well not exist as exist[14]. This is the modern attitude. The modern attitude is that for any social arrangement, there is always a conceivable alternative. Modern life encourages a flexibility towards social arrangements that the traditional attitude rejects. At a deeper level, moderns are people who know all about choice. Their world is a world of choice. Moderns are choosing beings. They can even choose their social arrangements. But what, if anything, gives meaning (rationality, consistency) to those choices? What is to stop any modern personality unchoosing tomorrow what she has chosen today? What is there to suggest that moderns stick by any choice they make? Are their choices anything other than arbitrary?

For the choices of any human being to be meaningful, they must exhibit a consistency. They must «fit» (be in harmony with) the decisions, choices, and actions that preceded them. If we were to imagine a self with no continuities, we would see before us a life that made no sense. That is to say, there is no meaning in a human life that lacks identity. And there is no reason in this life either. Reason (logos) is the surety that certain expectations will be constantly and continuously met; that

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12 *Renaissance Man*, pp. 74-75.
13 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 16.
14 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 17.

certain signs will signify roughly the same thing or event over a prolonged time-span[15]. Reason means that a thing is identical with itself; a certain quality and its opposite cannot be attributed to the same substance at the same time[16]. Things, actions, words, gestures only «make sense» to us where this is the case. When our expectations of identity (continuity) are confounded. human beings feel betrayed and deceived[17]. When human beings tear up the continuity of their own life, they experience self-betrayal. Character is the expression, in a person, of continuity. A person of (good) character will act reliably. with certainty —they will be honest, or courageous. or faithful under all circumstances. When we find that they have not acted so, we are dismayed. In finding out, we discover «the truth» aboutthem. In discovering «the truth» aboutthem. we are not discovering some fact about them, or some peccadillo, or some idiosyncrasy or colorful feature of their personality, or some waywardness that all human beings possess. To discover (the awful) truth is to find that one has been deceived by the outward appearance of consistency. A person who is «true» is trustworthy and «loyal» to their principles. their friends. their word, etc., —to some central value[18]. To discover the contrary is to discover that this person's life has been «a lie», that they have betrayed the important things in their life. But what are those «important things»? Are there any «important things» left in a world of contingency? Or does contingency render constancy (reason. identity) null and void? Does the awareness of contingency represent the coming of «the end of reason»?

In traditional societies continuity meant the constant minding of the customs of a society right from the time of the mythological founding gods and heroes. With the onset of the Axial Age, there was a break-through to another kind (a more intellectualised kind) of reason: the continuous observance of a handful of (abstract) norms became possible (at least for an «elite»: the citizen. the sage, etc.) even if against the grain of society. The identity of «the association of citizens, of the wise, etc.» was exhibited in the continuous movement of the association as a whole towards a cosmological end (telos). The telos of the virtuous actor was natural. The virtuous actor belonged to a cosmos, or some kind of embracing order, that was meaningful, that had a purpose continuously running through it. In the polis all virtuous actors were zoon politikon - their natural end was citizenship. In the Hellenic Age, the natural end was «tranquillity of mind». The unwavering pursuit of such a natural end was the sign of reason, and whosoever pursued such an end could achieve a good life, which was to say a life rich in meaning and significance. By striving for «higher purposes» a person could live a life that was «heightened»;[19] they could perform actions that would stand out, that would be remembered, etc. In a world of contingency there is no nature, no cosmic telos, not even reason in History. Or at least, the only nature, the only universal thing is freedom (contingency), and that freedom is in itself devoid of meaning. The ancient notion of a natural law that embraced everything (and everyone) in the universe became abbreviated in the modern world to a notion, first, of natural right, and then later of human right. In other words, it was reduced to the notion that everyone, everywhere experiences (at least potentially) contingency. In the world of contingency, there is no other kind of nature, no substantive nature, that provides the basis for human identity. Does this mean then that there are no higher purposes for human beings? Certainly there are no such purposes in the world of contingency if we mean by a «higher purpose» the natural

15 Ágnes Heller, *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, Blackwell. Oford. 1993, p. 96.
16 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 96
17 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, pp. 93, 96-97.
18 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 127.
19 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 204.

telos of all human beings. There is no such universal purpose in a world of contingency, and there cannot be one. So does this in turn mean that there is no longer any «truth» in human lives? For there to be «truth» in human lives, there must be some end to which action (conduct) is continuously referred: an end for which virtuous action is required if that end is to be realised or served because virtuous action is a sign of constancy in pursuit of the end even under the most difficult of circumstances. «The truth» of a human life is only at issue if a person betrays the purpose(s) of their life's actions by inconstant behaviour. In Modernity (the age of contingency) there is no universal truth —unlike, say, the Greek or Hellenic poleis, or the Christian City of God. But this is not to say, however, that there is no truth, or reason, or meaning possible in the Age of Contingency. In the absence of an all-embracing substantive Nature (cosmos) in Modernity, truth has been pluralised. There are a number of (competing) truths, accessible to modern men and women[20]. None of these truths universally compels[21]. Put another way: there are several sources of meaning in Modernity[22] (in the same way that there are several institutional sub-systems). The consequence of this is that truth is also now subjective. This follows from the pluralisation of truth(s). There are several different kinds of truth: one truth is the «truth for you», another truth is the «truth for others»[23]. As Kierkegaard concluded: the truth which edifies is the truth for you. This does not mean, however, as Heller points out, that the truth that edifies you is the truth for you alone. You may share that truth with many other men and women, even all men and women. Nor does it mean the truth is invented or owned by individuals. «Truth for me» is not identical with «my truth»[24]. Truth is still objective: it stands outside (over and above) individuals. This is a necessity if truth is to edify, for that which edifies grabs hold of the whole of one's existence —it «seizes, shakes, changes, elevates this very existence»[25]. Yet the objectivity of truth does not imply, necessarily, its universality. In a contingent world, there is not just one truth «there» for the guiding of action and conduct. Even if there is one truth that edifies you, there will still be other truths that don't edify you, but that do edify others. So then is truth merely relative to an individual's shifting (transient) opinion: equivalent to whatever one happens to be thinking today? Not at all. The pluralisation of truth(s) does not of necessity render the truth that edifies me any less absolute than if it was a universal truth. As Heller says: «Truth can still shine in the light of the Absolute for me, although I am aware that it does not for (certain) others.»[26]. In a world of contingency, there are several absolutes. Does this then mean that what is true (absolute) for me, is not true (a lie, a betrayal) for others? Not necessarily: when you and I part it is because one of us is edified (lifted up) by something (an end, a purpose) that the other is not edified by. But both parties can still (intellectually, if not emotionally) mutually recognise each others' truth. If there is a truth that contains all other truths, it is this.

Mostly, the truths we have access to come down to us from past times. That is to say, the recognition of truth is (mainly) a recollection of truth. Modernity produces (directly) little to edify us. The great Romantic Modern movements of the early 19th and early 20th centuries are a partial exception to this[27], but even these movements are extinguished. They are now, themselves, objects

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20 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 117.
21 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 125.
22 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 120.
23 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 129.
24 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, pp. 133-134.
25 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 134.
26 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 189.
27 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 189

of recollection. Modernity has been mainly good at creating institutions, not meanings. The kind of orientative values (axia) capable of setting in train a consistent, coherent pattern of social or individual action are largely missing from the palette of Modernity. Certainly there was a set of interrelated «modern values» — dynamism, progress, development, innovation, experimentation, change, transformation, self-determination, openness— that were seen by many in the glory days of Modernity as «the truth». But moderns have had to face the fact these «modern values», far from being the crux of a coherent form of life, proved, in many instances, destructive of meaning and coherence. Modern dynamis by itself so often produces meaning only by destroying it. Few can accept dynamis (and its related values) as the only orientative value today. Many don't even see it as the chief value anymore. The dynamis of High Modernity is but one possible orientative value, now of past times, to be recollected along with others. Those others include religious values (love, charity), civic values (republican values), Stoical values (tranquillity of mind), epicurean values (friendship). These values are the product of the whole of Western history. «Modern men and women are diggers. They dig out the past to recollect items bygone[28]. Their search for meaning is retrospective because our world does not originate new meanings. Our spirit is spiritless. It lives on borrowed meaning[29]. This is not to say that postmoderns —i.e. those who even see Modernity in a kind of retrospect— live nostalgically in an historical past. Rather, their recollection takes place by a kind of andacht or piety of thinking[30]. What is received and kept alive in the piety of thinking, Heller argues, is neither temporal nor spatial. The meanings (truths) that are recollected are not the meanings of living historical (or national or regional) paradigms (i.e. the exemplary or paradigmatic expressions of truths or valid values). Piety of thinking does not even imply the cult of a once-lived paradigm (e.g. the ancient Greek polis) nor of a once-lived thinker representative of that paradigm (e.g. Aristotle)[31]. Rather, what the piety of thinking does is to immortalise certain values (truths, true values) extracted from various paradigmatic (and, while exemplary, still socially embodied) expressions of these values. One removes the core of timeless truth from those paradigms, and leaves behind the extraneous and time-bound social shell. One does not seek to find the truth in Aristotle or the Greeks, in Seneca or the Romans, as such, but to engage in and to carry on a discourse about different truths that they first enunciated. While one might attribute certain historical beginnings to a particular discourse, the point is not to re-live the past, but to think about the valid values that can be redeemed from the debris of the past. The attitude of the Greeks (of Aristotle) to slavery, to women, is time-bound, but the pursuit of the ethico-political is not. We can join in a timeless conversation about the ethico-political in the same way that we can join in a timeless conversation with the Romans and the Stoics about the art of living without passion. We can engage in conversation with the representative figures of the past as if they were with us in our presence. We do this through an act of recollecting. When this recollection takes place, individuals receive different truths (different axia) with a devoutness, with a devotional feeling. They recollect these in a state of self-surrender, in a state of pleasurable, admiring surrender to something higher, and lift themselves up in the act. Whosoever practices this piety of thinking, lives, spiritually, not in the here and now, nor in another time and place but in the spaceless and timeless Kingdom of Meaning[32]. «In Andacht the remote becomes the closest, there is no distance nor is there time. In

28 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 188.
29 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 189.
30 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, pp. 184-185.
31 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 206.
32 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 189.

piety (of thinking) we are "presencing": there is "eternal presence" (parousia). Presencing is immortality. Whatever we receive while we are receiving becomes immortal through the piety of thinking and in it...»[33]. We can recall all traces of worth, all axiological treasures into the timelessness of the present[34]. Those who practice the piety of thinking also become immortal insofar as they practice it. They become immortal, not in some undetermined future or place, but immortal here and now through the act of presencing[35].

A world like the modern world, which produces little and ever-decreasing meaning on its own, requires pious individuals who are devoted to salvaging, restoring and maintaining the spirit of charity, friendship, tranquillity of mind, and any of the other axia that they can transfigure from the past to the enduring present of the Kingdom of Meaning. But what kind of congregation do these pious souls belong to? Or indeed do they belong to any congregation at all? What, if anything, can they collectively worship when there is such a diversity of axia? There is no postmodern equivalent of the ancient polis or the Christian community[36]. Philosophical, religious, aesthetic, ascetic values, and the rest, are all present. They are all re-present-ed. The contemporary «absolute spirit» is omnivorous. It includes everything. It is loath to exclude anything[37]. Even if the recollection of meanings is incomplete, there is no forgetting of meaning[38]. «Paradigm-pluralism is essential for the spirit of Modernity, yet the self-same pluralism bears witness to the elusiveness of the spirit of our congregation: no single and comprehensive self-consciousness of our age can emerge.» We are not unambiguously any one thing. «He who says that there is only one paradigm in Modernity will be regarded as a fool; he who says that there should be only one paradigm in Modernity will be regarded as a madman coming from the moon or a pre-modern congregation.»[39]. One might add that anyone who says that the modern paradigm is or has ever been the only one in Modernity is deluded. The frequency and repetition of various kinds of «classic» and «gothic» revivals in the Modern Age is evidence enough of this. Neither the modern paradigm nor any of the many non-modern paradigms can satisfy the postmodern congregation in its entirety. As Heller says, none of these paradigms has the privilege to aspire to the position of the «only», the «real», the true one[40]. None can be absolute for the congregation as a whole, for the universitas fidelium. The pious soul can insist that his and only his paradigm is true; but this insistence does not move the congregation as a whole for whom there is a great variety of paradigms (exemplary embodiments of truth) to choose amongst[41]. Each pious soul (true believer), of course, puts pressure on his fellows, but he can no longer brand anything as heretic or immoral[42]. So instead it is branded as «untimely». Yet the Kingdom of Meaning is timeless. It permits all the (immortal) values and works of the past a presence, an immediacy, a relevance. And in doing so makes a mockery of such charges.

Our epoch, the postmodern one, has a distinctive self-consciousness. Its self-consciousness is the making of the past self-conscious[43]. Its self-consciousness is the consciousness of other epochs.

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33 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 185.
34 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 203.
35 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 185.
36 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 182.
37 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, pp. 178-179.
38 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 179.
39 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 190.
40 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 198.
41 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 198.
42 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 191.
43 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 194.

not of its own epoch. In making themselves aware of themselves via the past postmoderns, though, do not proceed as Hegel did: the consciousness of our epoch is not the culmination of the progressive unfolding of the «absolute spirit», with each step (each historical truth) subsumed in each subsequent step, each truth (or each paradigmatic expression of that truth) part of a sequential unfolding of the whole, with the whole encompassing and incorporating each part in a progressive adventure. For us today, for postmoderns, there is no progression of the absolute spirit. Progress is but one truth amongst many. The now «timeless» value of the modernists (progress) is but one orientative value (axia) amongst many. The Kingdom of Meaning is not a progressive state, but an enduring present (a timeless moment) between past and future. The consciousness of our epoch is not so much an historical consciousness but a consciousness of (different) historical consciousnesses[44]. What is apparent in the Kingdom of Meaning is not so much the Truth of History but the redemption of different truths from the historical panorama. In the Kingdom of Meaning, the past becomes spatio-temporalized in the process of being «presenced»[45]. This consciousness of historical consciousness, this historical consciousness in and for itself, is not a paradigm but rather the condition of reception of all paradigms[46]. This self-consciousness of historical consciousnesses has no explanatory power and therefore cannot serve as a paradigm.

Look around the contemporary congregation: some of the congregation are devoted to the ethico-political good, others to aesthetic beauty, others to the aesthetic sublime, some to the love of God and their neighbour, others to the care of the self, and so on. Some (many) outside the congregation, of course, are devoted to nothing in particular. But of those inside the congregation: can they worship together? What can they collectively worship? One thing at least they share in common is their devotion to things of ultimate value (axia). The contemporary congregation shares a common effort to redeem things of value —things that have an intensity of value— from the debris of the past. What makes the congregationalist a congregationalist is the readiness to approach the «valid values» and higher meanings embedded in the religious, philosophical, or ascetic works of the past with an attitude of «contemplative devotion»[47]. The congregationalists also share the effort of continuing a conversation —and continuing to think— about the axia dredged up from the murk of the past. Of course, given the diversity of axia, much of this thought ends up being private, idiosyncratic, or confined to small circles. There is no substantive discourse shared by contemporaries. Instead there are rival, overlapping, intersecting, multifarious discourses. Some of the congregation take up the cause of the ethico-political, others of neighbourly benevolence, others still the cause of rational asceticism, etc. Some like Aristotle, others like Augustine, others like Seneca, and so on. Some congregationalists mix and match —a little from the Greeks, something from the Romans, something more from the Church Fathers, etc. The blending takes place in different proportions according to the idiosyncrasies of different personalities. Each offers a different axiological ordering or blending. Some want to unify the good and the beautiful, the ascetic and the sublime; others want to concentrate solely on one of these, and ignore the rest. Any of these things are possible and so far as the spirit of our times is concerned, acceptable. The reception of truth is subjective. There is no conceivable rational discourse that could lead one man and one woman, each with their own favourite axia or favourite ordering of the axia to convince the

44 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 194.
45 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 197.
46 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 195.
47 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 206.

other that this ultimate value was valid while the one professed by the other was invalid, or that one ordering of ultimate values (absolutes) was right and the other wrong, or that this amalgam of ultimate values was true, while that of the other was not, or that the idea of amalgamating or unifying ultimate values was sensible while the opposite was not. Others in our historical past lived in worlds where there was a single ultimate value (or single set of values) and a single «great book» embodying that value. «A single Homer was enough for all the Greeks, a single Torah for all the Jews, a single Gospel for all the Christians...»[48]. The postmodern congregationalists, however, inherit all of the great books (and people still make cases for all the noteworthy books that are left out of consideration.)

II

There is no (single) great book, no (single) dominant culture, no (single) value or set of values from which we can draw meaning today. Heller regards this as strictly a phenomenon of late, or post, Modernity. However, late Republican/early Imperial Rome, 12th century Humanism, the Renaissance, and the 18th century Augustan Age were all periods receptive to a variety of «truths». All were periods distinguished by the eclectic reception of the objectified meanings and values of the past. Cicero (a great eclectic thinker) coined a term for this attitude. He called it the disposition of humanitas. This attitude combined a devotion to the major works of the past together with a scepticism directed towards the exclusiveness of their respective claims. Renaissance humanists drew freely from Stoics, Epicureans, from Aristotle and Plato, from the Church Fathers, without insisting on the supremacy of any one school. Thomas Jefferson, a great representative of 18th century humanism, drew widely on Greek, Roman and Christian thought[49].

The periods of humanism were meaning-rich periods. Postmodernity, by contrast, seems a meaning-poor period. It appears thin, rather than thick, in meaning. Yet it bears an obvious resemblance to the great periods of humanism. How can we explain the similarity and the difference? The key difference is a result of the separation of meaning and action in modern societies. There has been an increasingly influential view in 20th century life that it is possible —through the medium of institutionalisation— to structure action without recourse to objectified bodies of meaning (that is, without recourse to philosophy, religion, art, etc.), and that institutionalised sub-systems of governments, corporations, and laboratories could be developed without significant reference to any rounded picture of good human conduct. While institutionalised sub-systems are constructed around values --democracy, markets, science, etc.— these values do not imply any virtues (as Aristotelian, Stoic, or Christian values did). They imply nothing about human character, or the rationality (consistency) of human conduct. If there is rationality, it is purely systemic (for example, to buy when the price is too high or to ignore legal procedures is irrational). In this circumstance, objectified bodies of meaning have been relegated to the Siberia of the universities where they have become products to be handled according to the institutional imperatives of that sub-system. In the university, of course, one finds personalities who are devoted to particular truths, just as one finds such personalities in any of the other institutional spheres. But, as in other spheres, in the university, the handling of what is valuable is for many (most) just a job (a career), to be done, competently, efficiently, in return for income and status, according to the rules

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48 *A Philosophy Of History In Fragments*, p. 207.

49 See, e.g., Karl Lehmann, *Thomas Jefferson American Humanist*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1985.

and procedures and policies of the institution but without any spirit. These «sensualists without heart», the experts that plague modern life, have, in their role as the minders of the great books, contributed significantly to the explosion of scholarly output that has occurred in Western universities since the 1920s. Never have so many commentaries, so many interpretations, so many deconstructions, of the great books been written - to such little, lasting effect. The Renaissance humanists were great hermeneuticians, translators, and scholars, but our contemporaries, by contrast, lack their spirit. How could they possess their spirit when we no longer assume that meanings are important for action, that the writing of some dead philosopher or emperor turned Stoic sage will be translated into human actions and deeds, and will shape human conduct? What «shapes» human conduct today are institutions, not world views.

This is by no means without consequence. The defenders of institutions say that their members are much more productive when they do not have to relate their action to some objectified set of meanings. In the simplest of terms, supermarkets can operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if their staff don't go to church on Sundays. The «tenured radicals» of the 60s and 70s generation in the universities are much more productive than their untenured counterparts of the 40s and 50s —because they no longer have to go to party meetings or public assemblies. They just write interminable commentaries on texts, or commentaries on commentaries. Such productivity is a miracle of modern life. Yet, late in the 20th century, as productivity rises, or as institutions strive to lift it, as corporate and government and arts bureaucracies tighten their procedures and «rationalise» wherever they can, the wealth of Western societies (wealth in its broadest sense) declines. Perhaps, looked at in the light of this paradox, the old attitudes of the humanists may have something, after all, to tell us, viz. that wealth-producing institutions produce their wealth not because of procedures or policies or institutional rules but because of human beings who are «lifted up» by certain old-fashioned «truths» (valid values) that are capable of investing action with meaning, and that require of their devoted adherents continuous observance of ethical norms in order to be realised —norms that give depth to human lives, that fill them out. Perhaps, as Heller says, the institutional base of Western societies can continue without reference to its spiritual superstructure. But it will only do this at the cost of the continuing dilapidation of its institutions. In the civilisation of the West, both freedom and wealth have developed under the auspices of abstract (ethical) norms. Westerners became free by learning how to apply, implement, amplify, etc, certain abstract norms for themselves. They learnt, in so doing, to think for themselves. Less obviously, but as importantly, the West became wealthy because of its system of virtue. Most doctrines of virtue that have been significant in shaping the mentality of Westerners, let us say from Aristotle onwards, have regarded wealth with some suspicion. Is it then justified to say that virtue begets wealth? If we look at the periods of great «take-off» in societal wealth (classical Greece, Rome of the late Republic and the Principate, the late medieval communes, the Italian Renaissance city states, England and America in the late 18th and early 19th century) we find that an intense interest in «classical virtue» accompanies the creation of wealth. Why is this so, when the moralists (the defenders of virtue) warn against the corruptions of wealth? It is because the accumulation of wealth requires the steady observance of norms. This is true whether we are talking of wealth in a narrow sense of money and property, or in the wider sense of power, renown, collectibles, or levels of transfer payments in society. There are, in effect, a number of measures of the wealth of a society. But whatever kind of wealth we are talking about, to accumulate it requires the traits of character we call the virtues. We cannot explain the wealth of America today unless we understand the long-term effect of the «classical virtues» of self-control, temperance,

prudence, and so on, that pre- and post-revolutionary Americans studiously absorbed. Property is not maintained. infrastructure is not put in place, science is not endowed, museums are not supported, poverty is not alleviated without the delay of gratification and the sense of duty and responsibility (towards oneself, or one's family or friends, or society generally) that the virtues, or more generally, civilisation, imbue. The translation of classical Stoic virtue into a modern idiom that then passed into Protestantism (Lutheranism, Methodism, etc.) was crucial to England's industrial (Manchester) revolution and spurred Germany's rise to the ranks of the wealthy nations. The entablature of the West rests on the three columns of virtue, freedom and wealth. Only where there is a mutually supportive relationship between the three, does the West flourish. In the Age of Modernity, this mutually supportive relationship is upset. There is, for a start, a gradual loss of the power of ethical norms. The consequence is that freedom becomes the freedom to expand. The limits represented by norms are extinguished. Persons come to see themselves not as selves that apply and juggle different ethical norms (limits) independently of societal authorities, even in opposition to societal authorities and their sanctions (and in doing so act as autonomous moral personalities) but as selves that must overcome norms, either through «critical opposition», or through the pretence that they gives themselves norms, that they are «autonomous» in the sense of «self-legislating». In overcoming norms, social actors imbibe the illusion that they can develop, move, accumulate infinitely. Without the encumbrance of norms, of the classical virtues, the wealthy and the custodians of wealth convince themselves that they can accumulate the wealth without limit. From this arises all kinds of self-defeating behaviours. Moreover, it suggests that the classical moralists were right to regard wealth, independent of virtue, as suspect.

As Heller argues, moderns see themselves as working to achieve and extend certain universalised values. But they do not see the virtues as relevant to this. The consequence of this is that moderns are left unhappy, invariably dissatisfied with their lot. In the classical conception, virtue is a condition of happiness, because virtue always implies some kind of temperate behaviour —moderation— and this in turn implies that there are limits to the desires or aspirations or reach of any individual, and that when an individual reaches that limit, they can rest happy. For moderns, self-development is assumed to be unlimited[50]. Individuals, in this setting, never feel that they own enough, that they are able to legislate enough, that they know enough, or have collected enough, or indeed are secure enough. As Heller puts it: «Modern man is... Faustian man: yet he does not implore the present moment to stay unchanged as it is so beautiful. Nothing should remain as it has been. Achieving something is not fulfilment: one immediately reaches out for the next thing. Should we cherish the hope that by achieving something, we shall alleviate our suffering from «wants», such a hope evaporates the moment we actually achieve the thing desired, as we feel another want, ad infinitum.»[51] There seems little room anywhere in the lives of moderns for cognitive feelings —feelings of satisfaction, cheerfulness, pleasure, gladness, etc. Instead the feeling structure of moderns more often (too often) is dominated by «hungers», «drives», «anxieties», «urges», by what Kant called «lusts», or, put differently, by pre-rational feelings that are unsatisfiable. At least in pre-modern societies, gluttonies or lusts —various kinds of greed or cruelty— were (after a fashion) satisfiable because bodily appetites are ultimately limited by the human organism[52]. In Modernity, even this limit is deconstructed. Individuals develop appetites (passions) for non-corporeal things,

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50 *The Power Of Shame*, p. 301.
51 *The Power Of Shame*, p. 304.
52 *The Power Of Shame*, p. 305.

laws, knowledge, security, etc. —for all kinds of universalised values that have been detached from the context of classical virtue. They are driven to accumulate possessions, control, information, or whatever, without any sense of limit. It might be argued that it is this which creates the great wealth of modern nations. But is this so? As Heller suggests, the pursuit of unlimitedness has self-destructive consequences[53]. Self-destructiveness is evident on a number of levels. In practical terms, the unlimited expansion of modern industry (that is, of scientific knowledge applied via technologies to the control of nature) has raised «the spectre of ecological catastrophe».[54] Unlimitedness in other spheres of human activity leads to frenzies of commercial speculation, to the Alexandrianism of the monster museum builder, etc. Even more disturbingly, the flirtation with the unlimited, so characteristic of the Modern Age, leads in some instances to the erection of new and destructive kinds of human authority in lieu of the authority of the virtues. These include the authority of the (Nietzschean) good conscience, which is Man deified[55], and the authority of the narcissistic conscience. In the case of the former, «Man deified is the Law; there is no Law except his will; thus he abolishes all laws»[56], and in so doing, all limits of behaviour; in the case of the latter, the person concentrates entirely on his own self-development to the point where he simply doesn't «notice» others and the limits others represent for the self even if only simply through their sheer existence[57]. For both persons of «good conscience» and of «narcissistic conscience», their practical reason is the sole arbiter of conduct. Prudence, self-control, temperateness, no longer condition their actions. While these are the extreme cases, they dramatise the fact that moderns generally have difficulty establishing limits. The symbolic figures of prudence, temperance, justice —the external authorities of classical virtue— that represent limits to human beings have either been demolished or degraded in Modernity. Universalised values have failed to function as an adequate substitute for the virtues. In the end, the temptation of moderns becomes that of pursuing universalistic values indiscriminately. (There are extraordinarily silly people who will say that there is nothing that cannot, or should not, be sold —that there is nothing that cannot be collected, nothing that should not be democratised, nothing that should not be subsidised.) The figures of justice, prudence, temperateness, etc, functioned to gently remind people that one could go so far and no further. It was up to them, freely using their practical reason, to precisely define the boundaries of action, but they were reminded via the authority of the classical virtues that boundaries were important. The only external authority of any kind that many (perhaps most) moderns acknowledge for their behaviour is the authority of success, of getting bigger and larger, grander and higher in any field of endeavour. What matters may be individual success; it may be group or corporate success. Yet in whatever guise, modern success is not «measured» in relation to the classical virtues, that is, in relation to the attainment of specific and limited objectives, but rather is «measured» in relation to magnitude (quantum), to what Kant called «the mathematically sublime», to what is beyond all comparison great, to progress ad infinitum, to the colossal, to that which has no definite end, to that which is without limit[58].

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53 *The PowerOf Shame*, p.313.
54 Ágnes Heller, «A Theory Of Needs Revisited', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 35, 1993
55 *The Power Of Shame*, pp. 38-39.
56 *The Power Of Shame*, p. 39.
57 *The Power Of Shame*, pp. 37-38.
58 Kant, *The Critique Of Judgement*, Book 2.

III

Today, «the consciousness of the Limit (peras) re-emerges»[59], because people see, and are affected by, the consequences of acting without any sense of limit or responsibility. Whether this is exemplified in the commercial frenzies whipped up by investment speculators or literary frenzies whipped by infantile aesthetic deconstructors is in the end irrelevant. The best, most astute of the critics of the aperatic condition, ranging across the political spectrum, and including Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Ágnes Heller (and before her, Hannah Arendt) seek to restitute something of the authority of the virtues. All these thinkers, whatever might otherwise set them apart, are agreed that Modernity's condition of being «after virtue» is problematic and riddled with dangerous or repellent consequences. Identifying the problem is (relatively speaking) the easy part; solving the problem is more difficult, and certainly more contentious. If we are to talk about the «return to virtue» we are confronted with a number of problems: what kind of virtue are we referring to? Is it pagan virtue? Is it religious virtue? Is it something of both? Is it modern virtue? Is something of all these things?

Ágnes Heller's answer to these difficult questions is to propose a doctrine of virtue that has a classical feel yet is attuned to modern conditions. The dialogue of the modern and the classical in Heller's work has an unmistakeably humanist character. It is not an attempt to resurrect a single conception of virtue or axiological truth but to listen attentively to a variety of ethical and postethical voices, and to weave out of their threads a coat that can serve (for the wearer at least) to keep out the chill-wind of the present-day. Heller works in a manner that is reminiscent of the Greek eklegein —in manner that selects the best from rival systems, and she does so with such effortless authority as to be able to unite the multitude of voices into a harmonic and beautiful ensemble. If we listen carefully, we can hear, orchestrated in her work, the gorgeous, melodious interplay of Stoic and Modern, as well as Aristotelian, Epicurean, Judiac and Christian parts. This choral work is unquestionably one of the finest, one of the richest, products of Western humanism. Such a work must have its idiosyncratic aspect. How the dialogue of parts is arranged —or who will have the leading parts and who will have the subsiduary ones —will always be matters about which (great) composers will differ, each prefering their own (unique) synthesis of parts. But there is nothing idiosyncratic in Heller seeking to make «present» the (philosophical, ascetic, religious) ethics of the ages, and to invite us (ethically impoverished moderns) onto the timeless stage of this drama to converse and argue with the moral wisdom of the past (including our own immediate past). Heller begins with an decidedly old-fashioned question: how can one be satisfied (i.e. happy) in a dissatisfied world?[60] To regard happiness as a core value —as significant as wealth or freedom— is immediately to pay a homage to the world of classical virtue. But Heller does not do this by repudiating Modernity. Her ambition is to find a way of holding onto the gains of Modernity (its universalistic values) while making good its losses. How might it be conceivable to restitute something like a eudaimonic ethos in highly modernised settings that have for 200 years or more systematically denied the practical relevance of happiness to their fretting, anxious, restless denizens? What place can we (sensibly, intelligently) find for a eudaimonic ethos in modern societies that rely on dissatisfaction —on the dynamics created by restless personalities (modern nomads)— to reproduce themselves?[61] In these modern societies, life is experienced as highly

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59 Ágnes Heller, «The Theory Of Needs Revisited', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 35, 1993, p. 32.
60 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, chapters 2 and 3.
61 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 14.

comingent. Whatever a person does, they can well imagine doing something different, or in a different way. Moderns have a strong sense of alterity, and a corollary of this is that they have a strong sense that the world they inhabit is one of unlimited possibilities. They know that they are longer born into a fixed social position, and that their life is no longer defined (except perhaps in residual and ever-diminishing ways) by the fact that they happen to have been born a particular gender, race, nationality, or have inherited a certain status. The tendency of modern societies is to abolish all caste, or caste-like, distinctions. Much of the politics of Modernity is the struggle to end those naturalistic distinctions and the confusions and dilemmas generated as those distinctions are undone and possibilities are opened up for everyone by the erasure of traditional social hierarchies. Crucially, possibilities opened up are not possibilities realised. All moderns —whatever their background— now imagine much more for themselves than they will ever realise in their life-time. The price moderns pay for their openness is dissatisfaction (unhappiness). All modern individuals are unhappy with their lot. They have expectations they cannot realise: they complain, they become agitated and fraught when their expectations are not, and often cannot, be realised. They fight the gap that opens up between reality and contingent possibility «by becoming busy day and night or by amassing more and more wealth or more and more power.»[62] But such strategies only compound the problem.

Is there any solution to this problem? One might attempt in Western societies to do what the Japanese have done, and superimpose a kind of neo-traditional (communitarian) authority based on kinship-style structures over modern commercial, industrial, and governmental systems that are (as all modern sub-systems are) «growth» (expansion) orientated. But this ends up only marrying the exclusionary nature of traditional social arrangements (where all avenues of life are not open to each and every person, even in principle) with the unlimited horizons of moderns. The communitarian or neo-traditional adaptation of Modernity is not at all eudaimonic in character; the limits that such authority represents are not self-imposed, but socially imposed. They arise not out of character, but out of society. This begs the question then: is it possible for individuals to accept that there are indeed limits to individual life without those limits being imposed by (exclusionary forms of) traditional social authority? One way of placing limits on ourselves is to choose for ourselves a vocation in the Weberian sense of that word. When we do that we make an existential choice to become a scientist, politician, etc, and in doing so we exclude a number of contingencies from our life. The problem with this, Heller argues, is that in entering one of the sub-systems or spheres of modern life (democracy, markets, industry, etc.) we are entering spheres that are heavily institutionalised. The norms of institutions are procedural norms that regulate access to numbers, dollars, offices, etc; they are not abstract norms or virtues. A person who makes an existential choice to be a scientist or engineer does so (initially) because they want to excel in their chosen field of endeavour, yet their chance to excel is almost invariably overdetermined by the vicissitudes of institutional life —by the levels and distribution of power, riches, prestige of their institution, their adeptness at politicking, their good or bad fortune in steering themselves through the institution, and the compromises such steering may impose on their pursuit of excellence. Excellence belongs to the world of classical virtue. It assumes the rest of that world. Excellence requires the virtues, while movement in the sub-systems of modern societies (markets, industry, democracy, etc.) rarely requires virtuous conduct. Acts of public courage, intellectual fortitude, philanthropic generosity and so on are still possible today. But they run against the grain of institutions. Such acts have in a

62 *The Postmodern Political Condition*, p. 18.

way become a utopian horizon against which we measure the banality of institutional life. The highly differentiated character of contemporary life at first sight offers the chance for actors to invest energies and emotions deeply and unrelentingly into specialised activities and domains. But this prospect is more often than not a mirage. Continuity of action is confused with organizational routine; deep involvement with institutional affiliation. Nobody believes that modern institutions cultivate excellence; they are, at best, good at eliciting a mix of competence and efficiency from their staff. Pursuit of career mostly replaces pursuit of excellence, and that pursuit for almost everyone is at the mercy of fortune, fad and fashion. What management style, what intellectual style, what research program is in favour and how long it will last determines outcomes much like the wheel of fortune. And for Heller —a modern Stoic— reliance on such «goods of fortune» is unattractive. This is unsuprising as Stoics have always argued that happiness relies on our virtue, not on our fortune. For the Stoic, the condition of our happiness is that we are not subject to «alien» determinations —that we are not subject to the vagaries of things beyond our control. We are happy, in other words, when we are self-determining. What is it then that we are always capable of determining for ourselves? It is certainly not what happens in institutions, or in the course of our social life. Our health, our repute, the offices we hold, the riches we have, are all liable to be crucially affected by innumerable factors outside our control. So what is in our power to determine? The Stoic answer is: our morals, that is, our moral actions towards ourselves, towards others, and it is in this sense that Stoicism says that being virtuous is the condition of being happy. If we invest emotionally in the goods of fortune, like celebrity or profit, we will invariably get anxious, agitated, impatient, or upset because these goods are uncertain. Only by not setting too high a value on things which at any moment can be taken away (or that we can imagine at any moment could be taken away), and only by concentrating on those things that cannot be whisked away —on our capacity to act morally, the stuff of our inner moral self, the qualities of good character— can one enjoy happiness, contentment, equanimity, that is, satisfaction in a dissatisfied world.

Consequently, for Heller, the best existential choice we can make —the one that presages happiness— is the choice to be a good (decent) person. In making this choice (of all the possible choices we could make) we choose ourselves and all our determinations (our strengths and weaknesses, our background, our upbringing, our education, our temperament, etc.) When we choose ourselves we can not anymore make excuses for our actions («I had an unhappy childhood») or blame unpleasant experiences (the unconscious memory of childhood trauma) for what we do. In choosing ourselves, we turn the contingency of our birth and upbringing (to be born into this family, of this sex, in this time and place, of this ethnos, to be born with this temperament, to have experienced this brutal/gentle, loving/indifferent upbringing) into a destiny. That which is destined is irrevocable and inevitable (and thus akin to fate), yet (unlike fate) its inevitability and irrevocability springs from choice or free will[63]. We are able to say after we choose ourselves, that this was meant to be, and in so doing, we become self-determining; we release ourselves from whatever «alien» powers, or compulsions, are in our character[64]. In choosing all of one's determinations, the self who so chooses is free to become a good person[65]. But what does this good person look like? The Stoics classically talked of a person who had the qualities (virtues) of wisdom, self-control, etc., and who acted «according to nature» or, in terms of Zeno's original

63 On the idea of destiny and fate, see *Renaissance Man*, chapter 11.
64 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, pp. 14, 70.
65 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 17.

formula, who «acted consistently». Consistency in moral action remains for Heller an important characteristic of the good person. But she adds to the classical Stoic formula that equates moral action with rational (consistent) action. She fuses classical virtue with a kind of modern worthiness. She is a modern Stoic, meaning that she is ready in her moral doctrine to respond to and absorb a modern sense of morality, in particular the sense that the moral self is one who does not instrumentalise, manipulate, or use others. Of course in the classical tradition that stems from Aristotle (i.e. non-Stoical classicism), there is the view that the moral self is one who does not instrumentalise. But in the Aristotelian case, the aim is to avoid instrumentalising actions, not persons. Respect for persons as such was inconceivable in the Aristotelian social world where master-servant, master-slave relationships were a fact of life. It is only in the Modern Age that respect for persons qua persons becomes a central moral quality[66]. Kantian ethics was important in expressing this philosophically, and Heller's work exhibits an important Kantian influence. The key moral injunction observed by the good person, in her view, is the injunction not to use another person as a means but to treat them always as an end-in-themselves[67]. The good person acts on this premise consistently. It is part of their character. They act on this premise in all the departments of their life. It is of universal applicability[68]. The person of good character acts to avoid using others, in all circumstances, and irrespective of social sanctions[69]. The person who does so embodies what might be described as the singular modern addition to the various classical catalogues of virtue, viz. the virtue of decency. To treat persons as ends-in-themselves, we must avoid ridiculing and embarrassing them; we must notice their sufferings and help them achieve greater autonomy in themselves. To avoid treating others as means, we should avoid «playing» with their affections, violating their body or soul, manipulating them, keeping them in tutelage. There is, of course, more to decency than observing these moral requirements. The good person needs to learn when and where to make moral judgements, when to forgive moral transgressions, how to be tactful, etc. Moral goodness, additionally, can have an ethico-political dimension. The good person who exhibits «concern» is ready to address the causes of social injustice, to find out about and confront the institutional and social (i.e. no longer natural) source of others» undeserved misfortune. The good person who is a good citizen is prepared to participate in public acts to alter (contingent) social arrangements in order to remedy injustice. But while Heller's theory of morals accomodates, and integrates, the ethico-political (which has civic, and to some extent also Judaic, roots), like the Stoics, Heller insists on taking moral questions beyond issues of justice and citizenship, and rejects the notion that social concern or active citizenship by itself makes us morally good. Rather it is moral decency and respect for persons that constitutes, in Heller's view, the core of the moral self, and only by concentrating all our energies and capacities on acting decently (in any public or private, formal or informal avenue of life) will we end up acting in a self-determined fashion, for treating others as ends rather than means is entirely for us to do or not do. If we are riddled with venomous resentments, hatreds, jealousies, anxieties, fears that make us want to use and abuse others in order to protect or reassure ourselves that, in the face of the vicissitudes of the world, we are not powerless ---or in order to compensate ourselves for some past injury or abuse that has made us feel powerless— then we have not chosen all of our determinations (including those manifest in

66 *The Power Of Shame*, p. 303.
67 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 38.
68 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 38.
69 *A Philosophy Of Morals*, p. 42.

our weaknesses, our disabilities, the pains inflicted upon us, our sufferings, our torments). We have not said: this is not simply my contingency (it could have been, should have been otherwise) but my destiny —it was meant to be, and any experience of powerlessness, of being battered by forces I had no control over, makes me simply determined not (never) to treat others in such a fashion; my choice, but also in this case my determination, is always to act decently, to respect myself and others and to encourage self-determination in everyone and to resist the instrumentalising of persons wherever it occurs without resorting to any of the weapons of the instrumentaliser.