# Rethinking the Western Understanding of the Self

ULRICH STEINVORTH

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# Rethinking the Western Understanding of the Self

In this book, Ulrich Steinvorth offers a fresh analysis and critique of rationality as a defining element in Western thinking. Criticizing revelation, tradition, and collectivism, Western thinking champions rationality, human rights, and individualism, and culminates in a unique understanding of the self. The prevailing understanding of the self was formed by the Lockean conception and utilitarianism. Compatible with classical physics, it does not, however, explain the cataclysms that occurred in the twentieth century. Steinvorth argues that Descartes's understanding of the self offers a more plausible and realistic alternative. When freed from the dualism in which Descartes conceived it, such a conceptualization enables us to distinguish between self and subject. Moreover, it enables us to understand why individual rights – one of the hallmarks of modernity and the West – became a universal ideal to be granted to every member of society; how acceptance of this notion could peak in the seventeenth century; and why it is now in decline, though not irreversibly so. Most importantly, as Steinvorth demonstrates, the Cartesian concept of the self presents a way of saving modernity from the dangers that it now encounters.

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# Preface

Though I have tried to give every chapter a unity, this book is no collection of papers. It is the exposition and defense of a thesis on the self, rationality, and the social world in the order I found most convincing. I think it is best to follow it, though I do not want to exclude that a reader who follows another order can come to a better understanding.

In writing the book I found most agreeable and useful help for which I want to express my gratitude: to Sabine Jentsch for her discussion of many topics, in particular that of perfectionism, for asking so many intelligent questions, so few of which I was able to answer, and for pointing out a lot of mistakes; to Thomas Besch for confirming my intention to write the book; to Radu Bogdan for practical advice; to Robin Turner for correcting my English and commenting on my views; and to Ed Dunkley for the interest he showed in my book. Of course, neither they nor anyone else can be blamed for the mistakes that have survived. I also found it agreeable to think that the book might be of use for my children and grandchildren, to whom I dedicate it.

Important though I think my reflections are, I am fully aware how far they are from exhausting our understanding of the self, rationality, and the social world. They cannot be but the continuation of reflections that have been started by theorists, some of whom I have exploited, and badly need correction and continuation by other authors.

Bilkent/Ankara
September 2008

# *Part I*

# Introduction

You are not thinking. You are merely being logical.
*Niels Bohr to Albert Einstein*

# Chapter 1

# The West and the Self

THIS BOOK ATTEMPTS TO RETHINK THE RATIONALITY THAT DEVELOPED in the West. The West has its origins in ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity, but it is guided by ideas propagated and pursued by the Enlightenment. These ideas replaced or enriched traditional religion with belief in the value of the individual and her rational powers and inalienable rights, and with trust in science and technology, production, and trade. Openness to these ideas constitutes modernity,[1] with which the West can be identified. It constitutes a specific rationality, a way of justifying and explaining actions, that is oriented to utility, happiness, and individuality. The West can be defined neither geographically nor historically but only by its ideas and its superior rationality. This at least is the self-understanding of the West.

In a formal sense, there can be only one rationality. In this sense rationality is a way of thinking that follows the rules of logic. Though different logics have been developed, they are different interpretations of logical thinking rather than different rationalities. All civilizations have standards of how to judge, and hence possibly change, their habits and traditions. Such standards allow for detecting logical inconsistencies in one's intentions. Yet they may also allow for

[1] Huntington, "The West: Unique, Not Universal," argues that modernization does not imply Westernization; Inglehart, *Culture and Democracy*, musters empirical evidence that in the long run it implies democratization. Similarly, Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 14. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 126, argues that "Modern natural science has provided us with a Mechanism whose progressive unfolding gives both a directionality and a coherence to human history over the past several centuries," yet 234–44 comes closer to Huntington. I understand modernity as an attitude that favors individuality in a sense to be explored in this book, and civilization in a sense explained by Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*: Civilization in the singular means "broadly the opposite of barbarism" (4); in the plural it refers to different ways to oppose barbarism and to solve basic social problems. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," 30, approvingly quotes Braudel on civilization, yet from another work.

detection of what Max Weber called value rationality. There are as many value rationalities as there are ultimate values by which practical rightness of thought and action are judged, not logical truth. It is in this broader sense of rationality that the West has produced a rationality that claims superiority to alternatives.

Its claim is based on the idea that value rationality is measured by a general value that eschews the arbitrariness of using one rather than another specific value for a standard. This standard is most often understood as utility or happiness. Yet since Rousseau has opposed liberty to happiness, critics, implicitly or explicitly, oppose liberty, authenticity, or even the superhuman to the value of happiness and accuse Western or modern thinking of having degenerated into a logic that enslaves man, ruins nature, and produces world wars and extermination camps.[2] I agree with this critique of utility but reject the premise that it is identical to Western rationality. Rather, the West has produced two competing versions of the idea of an orientation to a general value; one for which happiness is the highest value and another for which it is the constructive enactment of one's capabilities. This book will defend the second conception.

The two conceptions share the immensely important property of enabling a society to reject traditions that do not stand up to its rational judgment. They liberate it from culture dependency.[3] A society that develops a conception of rationality, whether it orients to utility or capabilities, becomes forward looking and cannot but believe in progress,[4] as its rationality delivers a criterion of rightness. So despite all the differences of the two rationalities that I'll indicate, they agree in their commitment to the rejection of all traditions that do not stand up to rational judgment. Rethinking rationality is not abandoning it. Yet it makes a difference whether rationality is measured by utility or capability enactment, and a lot of criticism that is leveled against the West in fact can be leveled only against its utilitarian rationality.

Rationality and the concept of the self are closely interwoven. It was Europe's seventeenth century that developed two incompatible conceptions of the

[2] The criticism starts with Rousseau, was continued by Nietzsche, and in the twentieth century found its most prominent advocates in Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Hannah Arendt. On Muslim critics, cp. Chapter 22.

[3] I mean by *culture dependency* dependence on a culture that excludes its adaptation to nonrelativistic standards of rightness. Belief in it implies cultural relativism. For its criticism, cp. Robert Edgerton, "Traditional Beliefs and Practices," in Harrison and Huntington, *Culture and Criticism*, loc. cit. 126–40. The role of culture is well described by Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself." (cited by Huntington in his Foreword to ibid., xiv.)

[4] As pointed out, among others, by Lawrence Harrison (in his Introduction to ibid., xxvi), the idea of progress, "of a longer, healthier, less burdensome, more fulfilling life – is not confined to the West; it is also explicit in Confucianism and in the creeds of a number of non-Western, non-Confucian high-achieving minorities – India's Sikhs, for example." It is an aim of this book to explicate what capability enactment is. Provisionally, I may explain it as talent development.

self: a Cartesian conception and a Lockean one that later merged with utilitarian rationality. Though the utilitarian approach has prevailed, it is the Cartesian conception that best preserves the values of the West, is most adequate to history and human nature, and inspires to envision a form of association that enables us to respond to the specific challenges of the present by allowing everyone to enact their capabilities. This is what this book aspires to convince its readers of. It defends the West by rejecting its prevailing Lockean understanding of both the self and itself (for a conception of the self implies a self-understanding as well). It aims at "promoting the coherence of the West" and of its "precious and unique civilization" by using its capacity to be self-correcting,[5] and recognizes that we "risk destabilizing the entire world, including the declared enemies of the United States," if we do not rewrite rationality.[6]

This book is addressed to the general public, both within and outside academia, that is interested in contemporary social and political development and the reasons and causes that have produced the present and restrict and open up the future. Though it has an eye on practice, it is a contribution to theory and tries to meet the standards of theory. It is to these standards that I subject the interpretation of the authors I examine: Descartes, Weber, Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Freud among them. Pointing out their contributions to a conception of the self that is adequate to human capabilities shows them in unexplored perspectives that will deepen our understanding of them. This is why the book is also addressed to university classes in political philosophy and theory, ethics, and the history of ideas that discuss those thinkers.

To introduce you to my venture, consider that until the seventeenth century, the West followed a conception of the self that was stamped by Aristotle and the Stoa. Though it never lost influence, in the eighteenth century it was eclipsed by Locke's conception of the self that in the nineteenth century combined with utilitarian psychology and action theory. The self has a central position in Western thought because the way it is conceived commits us to a conception

[5] Huntington, "The West," 46. Former European Community President Jacques Delors urged that the "West needs to develop a deeper understanding of … other civilizations" (quoted by Huntington, "If Not Civilizations, What?," 194). True, but still more it needs to understand its own civilization, else it sees itself too fast as the victim of other civilizations' (Islam's) plots or vices. The need for self-analysis and self-correction is pointed out by Alex Inkeles, *One World Emerging*, Boulder, CO (Westview) 1998, 83, and Michael Fairbanks, "Changing the Mind of a Nation," in Harrison and Huntington, loc. cit., 268–81, 273. Belief in civilizations does not imply that what are clashing today are civilizations. There probably are very different causes of today's violent conflicts. Nor does it imply what (in analogy to what Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 139ff, calls *explanatory nationalism*) may be called justificatory culturalism, the view that economic underdevelopment can be blamed on domestic cultures.

[6] Jacques Derrida in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Chicago University Press, 2003, 93. Derrida, ibid, describes (value) rationality as "the system of interpretation, the axiomatic, logic, rhetoric, concepts, and evaluations that are supposed to allow one to *comprehend*."

of rationality and action, science and religion, and, most momentously, to a distinction of rational and individualist societies from less rational and more collectivist societies. Many Westerners felt that it was by this distinction that they differed from the rest of the world.[7] In philosophy the distinction appears in the development of the concept of mind.

The development starts when Plato distinguishes the "part of the soul with which it calculates" as its rational part and says it is "fighting a civil war" with another part of the soul, the seat of desires.[8] Thus, what has been called the higher faculties of the mind was distinguished from desire. The next step is Aristotle's distinction of active and passive reason and his exclusive ascription of the former to male Greeks. He declares "the male (to be) ruler and the female subject," and everyone "who participates in reason so far as to apprehend it but not to possess it" – that is, participates in passive reason only – to be "by nature slaves."[9] What rules the individual is active reason; it is by it that those who possess it are to rule the rest of mankind. Modern Europe will follow this idea, modifying it by the assertion that the faculty Aristotle ascribes only to male Greeks is given to everyone, though often tacitly, assuming that in fact it is used only by Europeans.

But Aristotle also ascribed to the ruling part of the soul an element that adds to its impersonal power of godlike reason a quality that will prove it to belong to an individual human self. This element is the power of deciding after deliberation "both to do and not to do" a possible action.[10] What we decide after deliberation depends not only on the reasons deliberated but also on our arbitrary will. Hence, reason as the faculty of deliberating reasons is inseparable from arbitrary will that decides differently in different individuals. The scholastics called the will enacted after deliberation free will and distinguished it from the power of free action, just as Aristotle had distinguished deliberate and voluntary action.[11] Descartes, as I'll explain, distinguished it as the self from the subject. I'll show that reason and the power of saying both *yes* and *no* to a proposition (that is, a possible action or a thought) can indeed rule both individuals and societies but is unfit for supporting any privilege for ruling.

[7] An example of this feeling is Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden"; cp. Chapter 6.

[8] Plato, *Republic*, bk. IV, 439d, 440b.

[9] Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1254b13–24. Aristotle distinguishes active and passive reason in *De anima*, 429b26–30a25.

[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1110a18. He discusses here voluntary actions, but decisions that spring from a capacity both to do and not to do a possible action presuppose that the action is "choosable," Haireton (ibid., a12), hence presupposes deliberation. H. Rackham and Grube mistranslate the "and" as "or."

[11] In *Nicomachean Ethics* III, ch. 1–3. The Stoics developed a similar view about the power of *synkatathesis*, of assenting to propositions. Via Cicero, it was no less if not even more influential than Aristotle. On its influence on Descartes, see Hiram Caton, *The Origin of Subjectivity: An Essay on Descartes*, Yale University Press, 1973.

However, the Cartesian conception of a *self* was rejected by most post-Cartesian philosophers primarily for its commitment to free will. With Locke, they blunted its specificity by identifying the self with an individual's consciousness; with Hume, they abandoned the concept of a self; with Kant, they faded it to a transcendental idea that no empirical data can ever correspond to. Or they continued talking of the self in a Cartesian way, leaving its properties in the darkness of contradictory explanations. In such muddy conceptual waters, no clarification of the concept of the self might seem possible. Yet it was provided as a result of ideas developed by sociologists and psychologists in an attempt to solve problems of social and individual development.

The sociologists' problem concerned the analysis of premodern clan societies, called Asian form of production in the Marxist tradition and closed society by Popper. Such societies proved amazingly resistant to change until the twentieth century, in particular in their ancient Chinese and Indian form. How was this possible? Hegel was explicit in asking this question;[12] Marx tried an answer, yet only Max Weber was fully aware of the difficulties of overcoming the bonds of premodern society and the significance that breaking them had for the development of the individual self and man's rationality. He laid the ground for assigning a collectivist and authoritarian rationality and self to premodern societies and an individualist and fallibilist one to modern societies.

The psychologists' problem concerned the passage from childhood to adulthood. Weber had pointed out the difficulty and improbability of passing from collectivist to individualist societies that had not been fully recognized before him. Freud did so for the passage from a stage in which we trust in the infallible authority of parents to one in which we accept responsibility and fallibility. Freud's reflections led to a similarly radical distinction of an adult self and rationality from childhood ones. Though the conceptual status of the self remained obscure, Weber and Freud rendered any conception of the self obsolete that would not integrate their distinctions of an individualist form of a self and rationality from a preceding authoritarian form.

In fact, when Heidegger restarted reflection on the self, he took account of this distinction. Like Wittgenstein a decade later, Heidegger rejected the Lockean conception that defines the self as continuous consciousness. Yet unlike Wittgenstein, Heidegger, though perhaps he did not think of his predecessors Weber and Freud, distinguished two forms of a self: an inauthentic self, the self of *das Man* or *them*, that in the beginning, and ordinarily guides, the person; and an authentic self that extraordinarily, in rarer and special cases, directs her but is difficult to attain. Due to Weber, Freud, and Heidegger and in spite of its schism between the majority Lockean and the minority Cartesian conception of the self, the West has produced a concept of a two-phased self in which a collectivist and authoritarian self precedes an individualist and fallible one. The latter is

[12] In his *Philosophy of History*, when he analyzed what he calls the Persian empire.

considered preferable because it uses faculties that the former self does not. It is the self that Westerners have ascribed to themselves and denied non-Westerners. This distinction of two phases has found less attention than the schism on free will. Yet it is no less important. It raises the prevailing Western understanding of the Western self and its difference from that of other civilizations onto a conceptual level and, still more importantly, implies another distinction.

This is the distinction of an *ordinary* life, self and rationality dependent on the first stage, from the *extraordinary* actions an autonomous self performs by a rationality that is fallible but instigates extraordinariness. Weber even found in the necessary liaison of the autonomous self with extraordinariness the reason for the extraordinary achievements he ascribed to the West. Like the distinction between a rational individualist and an only imperfectly rational collectivist self, the commitment, or condemnation, of the autonomous self to extraordinariness is not necessarily felt by everyone who feels they are a member of the West, though (as we'll see) it was expressed in Kipling's, "The White Man's Burden" and other documents of imperialism. But it can be reconstructed from the Cartesian conception, and not from the Lockean one, and thus allows testing the superiority of the Cartesian conception by looking at historical facts, as I'll do in Chapters 6–9. Let me present a first explanation.

Descartes's great discovery is that we cannot enact our faculty of judgment without enacting our self. It results from his distinction between having experiences, including desires, beliefs, and doubts, and judging whether we should do what desires and beliefs suggest. The deliberate judgment is what I cannot distance myself from; hence, it is myself. It is something that does not happen to me; I can even arbitrarily judge against evidence; therefore, my self is not an impersonal reason but an individual power. This Cartesian argument, to be explicated later,[13] is darkened by its often dualistic dressing. But we can present it without recurring to any kind of dualism.[14]

What we desire and believe is something that happens to us. Though it happens to *us*, it *happens* to us; we can decide that we do not want it to happen. What happens to us constitutes only, as I'll use the terms, our *subject*, not our *self*. We also can distance ourselves from anything that we do and judge without deliberation. We can say that we could not resist it and thus can refuse to accept it as something that might constitute our *self*. Even if we have to judge a proposition that seems to offer no way to say *no* – if, for instance, we agree that 2 + 2 = 4 – we

[13] In Chapters 2–5.

[14] In the twentieth century, Descartes was everyone's punching bag. Heidegger, Wittgenstein, the analytic philosophers, among others, tried proving their novelty by criticizing him. Belatedly, the fashion overtook leftists like Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, judging him "counterrevolutionary" and "cunning" in "effectively reaffirm(ing) dualism as the defining feature of experience and thought" (78–80) and basing the judgment on a defense of "immanence" that rejects an ontological difference of men from "simians and cyborgs" (91f). We need not be dualists to think such an immanence is just silly.

may say that it is not we who judge, as we do not decide but rather cannot resist agreeing. We can distance ourselves from our consent by stating that even the "peculiarly coercion-free coercive power of the better argument"[15] does not make our consent *our* consent. Only our deliberate decisions that we have been free to make and might have not made are what constitute our selves. From them we cannot distance ourselves without implying that our judgment has not been deliberate enough. Hence, we find our self in the power of judgment by which we can say *no* to any reason, also to moral ones. In this and only this quality, we remain identical over time. The self is what we are left with when we distance ourselves from anything that only happens to us, just as Descartes's *cogito* is what we cannot doubt after having doubted anything else. As we'll see, it is not only what renders reason, the power to weigh or deliberate arguments or reasons, an individual power, but also what makes us morally ambivalent and dangerous.

Deliberate decisions are at the same time acts of reason, of free will and of selves. They are acts of reason as we have to deliberate reasons for deciding deliberately. They are acts of free will as we may reject even the most evident reason (as Descartes argues) for the special reason that we want to demonstrate our independence of all predetermining factors. They are acts of selves, as we cannot distance ourselves from them. Our selves form a trinity with free will and reason.

Nevertheless, we are individuals who not only act (as a self), but also suffer (as a subject). As we are a unity of self and subject, we are creatures characterized by a specific dynamic and imbalance; for self and subject stand in a changing relation. Though necessarily we are led by the self, it is not the self but the subject that originally provides our existence with content and will always do so, though not exclusively. We start our existence as subjects that are free from any intervention of a self. We respond to our desires and other stimuli by following any impulse. Yet we can only avoid disaster if we develop controls for our spontaneous responses and initiatives. We learn most of such controls from our parents or other close persons. They represent to the pure subject the authority that controls the motions of the subject. We become adult when we take over the role of the control instance. This is only possible if, to the subject, the new instance of the self is added. To use Freud's terminology, when becoming adult we as the ego take over from the superego control of the id that represents our desires and constitutes the original subject. Yet once the self is added to the subject, conflicts between subject and self are bound to arise. As subjects we desire satisfaction of our desires; as selves we strive for the enactment of reason and free will.

Originally, the self, like the control authority of the parents, is only a means for attaining the aims set by the desires. But when we become selves, the

[15] This is how Habermas describes the power of argument on several occasions, e.g., *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* I, 28, 48, 552f; *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, 224 and 226.

enactment of this means becomes an end we pursue for its own sake, as the enactment of any capability is a delight for the agent. The self becomes master of the subject and is felt to be so. We cannot but be dissatisfied with restricting the self to satisfying the subject. What we demand is self-assertion. Desire satisfaction is what our life starts with; it is the ordinary. What we oppose to it, self-assertion, is the extraordinary. So the subject is necessarily associated with the ordinary and the self with the extraordinary. As what we deliberately decide is decided by our self and we aim at self-assertion, deliberate decisions follow the idea of the extraordinary, of something that denies any given desire or expectation, which are the ordinary. The self is inseparable from an ambition that pits it against the subject. As we'll see, this ambition can even survive the self.

If we can cull the story of the subject, the self and the ambition of extraordinariness, from an ideal-typical biography of modern man, we should also be able to cull it from a universal history of mankind; for there must have been a time in history when individuals started following their self rather than the social authority represented in the early individual as the superego. No society was ever able to survive without instances that control the spontaneous actions of individuals. In early human societies, control instances probably represented the authority of the strongest individuals, who may often have understood their judgments as revelations that were sent to them from divine powers. Already in such authoritarian societies some men have developed a self, and hence, craved for extraordinariness, as becomes plain in the conquests and adventures undertaken in many premodern societies. Yet they did not develop ideas that made it a duty for everyone to choose their life and develop a self, hence, to assert their self and to act extraordinarily. If we follow Weber, such ideas have been developed only by a special kind of salvation religion. Only by them could mankind take the step from childhood to adultness. I'll examine how far history can confirm this Weberian reading of the Cartesian conception.

Once we understand the connection of judgment and extraordinariness, we can no longer explain action and history in terms of utilitarian rationality. Utilitarian rationality explains any action A as the conclusion from two premises: a premise $P_1$, understood to be either normative or descriptive, that agents strive for maximizing their happiness, and a descriptive premise $P_2$ that A will produce more happiness than any alternative to it. In contrast, Cartesian rationality explains an action as the agent's decision for the best way to enact her specific capabilities, including her capability to aim at extraordinariness. It does not enable us to predict an action, because the choice for how best to enact one's capabilities is never without arbitrariness. But it allows an understanding of actions that for utilitarian rationality are irrational or unexplainable.

An example is the set of decisions for what became World War One. These decisions were compatible with the intention to increase happiness only if we consider glory, even the glory of suffering, a form of happiness. If we do so, the idea of happiness becomes inflated and loses its meaning. The decisions for war

are better understandable as decisions for the best way to enact the capabilities of those who had to decide. They are understandable as choices for extraordinariness. Utilitarian rationality led nineteenth-century liberals and socialists to expect peace and progress for the twentieth century. It blinded them to facts that might have warned them.[16] History is full of examples showing that the powerful preferred enacting their ambition of extraordinariness in war rather than in peaceful activities, if peace does not offer opportunity for extraordinariness, and that under the same condition the powerless preferred extraordinariness in the dissolution of their selves in supraindividual selves of tribes and ideologies.

If we are Cartesian rather than Lockean selves, we can expect history to show our ambition of extraordinariness not only in wars but also in constructive forms. In fact, even though utilitarian rationality did not allow Europeans to think of extraordinariness, they excelled in scientific, artistic, political, and economic activities. Such activities set positive values as objects to the indefinite and infinite craving for extraordinariness and transformed ambivalent ambition into the excellence of a discipline. Moreover, the spheres of science and art offered opportunities for escaping the restriction of extraordinariness to politics and the economy, the traditional fields of extraordinariness that sought political and economic power. However, to harness our ambition of extraordinariness today, we need to conceive and institute value spheres in a more comprehensive way than Weber did. We have to understand them as the core institutions of autonomous and even stateless societies that respond to a change in life conditions that is as deep as that to which the modern society of the past was the historical response.

To summarize the book, its idea is that we cannot understand the current complex problems of the West and the rest of the world, unless we understand how the West conceived of itself and the self. This idea is not new. It conforms to the everyday experience that to understand someone we must know her self-understanding and the way she reasons. Charles Taylor explicitly applied it to modernity. He attempted "to articulate and write a history of the modern identity," considered his attempt "the starting point for a renewed understanding of modernity," pointed out that "selfhood and morality" are "inextricably intertwined themes" and that in this relation morality is to be understood in a broad

[16] True, as Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 147, remarked, "the answer to the fateful question: why did the European comity of nations allow this evil" (of a war that she also compares to "some unredeemably stupid fatality," 267) to happen is that "the body politic was being destroyed from within." Yet one reason for this destruction was lacking understanding of extraordinariness. Herfried Münkler, *Empires*, 18–34, shows how little economic utilitarian theories of imperialism held by both social democrats (Sombart, Schumpeter, Hobson) and socialists (Luxemburg, Lenin) explain World War One. His insistence that recourse to "the striving for prestige" is unavoidable and cannot be consigned "to the realm of the irrational *tout court*." (31) agrees with the thesis of this book.

sense that includes "questions about what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilling." Though this book agrees on the aim, it differs from Taylor's approach by its different conception of the self.

Taylor describes "modern identity" as the "notion of what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self," and as designating "the ensemble of (largely unarticulated) understandings of what it is to be a human agent: the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West." Though he gives agency a prominent place in his conception of the self, it is only one element among others. He does not distinguish self and subject.[17] Yet, if we restrict the concept of the self to the element of agency, rather than exploring with Taylor the many facets of modernity and its development, we need to concentrate on the aspect of how individuals can and did detect their self and satisfy their ambition of extraordinariness. Concentrating on it has at least the pragmatic virtue of enabling me to be briefer than Taylor.

A last remark before I start my investigations. I have associated the ambition of extraordinariness with the second phase of the self that Heidegger called authentic. So we have to conclude that no individual can be authentic without the ambition of extraordinariness. Isn't this plainly false? Are we not to deny anyone authenticity who is ambitious of extraordinariness? Such objection, however, would not be raised if we used the term *excellence* for *extraordinariness*. Striving after extraordinariness reeks of vulgarity; striving after excellence is the ambition of extraordinariness under a name that escapes the reproach. But talk of extraordinariness has the advantage of marking out that, first, extraordinariness is meaningful only in its contrast to something ordinary or vulgar and, second, we can be both extraordinarily good and extraordinarily evil. We can excel in crime and cannot be hindered from doing so by reason alone, as reason, even though it is the only means to distinguish right and wrong and true and false, is inseparable from self-assertion.

[17] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, ix, and 3f.

# *Part II*

# Basics of Philosophical Psychology

Man is a free agent; but he is not free if he does not believe it, for the more power he attributes to Destiny, the more he deprives himself of the power which God granted him when he gave him *reason*.
*Giacomo Casanova*[1]

In this part, I examine Western understanding of the self. I start by expounding the two-phase conception in Heidegger and the basic role of judgment in Descartes, but point out their flaws in order to discount them right from the beginning. Heidegger succeeds in showing a radical difference between the childhood and the adult form of the self but fails to identify their crucial difference. Analysis of the difference will lead us to the Cartesian conception of the self, but also to his dualism that I want to show is not necessary for his conception of the self at all. The result of my argument is what I call the basics of philosophical psychology. It claims to present not the factual Western understanding of the self, but a reformulated form freed from its misconceptions.

[1] Giacomo Casanova, *History of My Life*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966, Vol. 1, 26.