Annemie Halsema & Douwe van Houten (eds.)

EMPOWERING HUMANITY

State of the Art in Humanistics

de Tijdstroom

5 Humanism and the Romantic Syndrome

An Analysis through Form and Meaning

Fons Elders

During three centuries, Western culture has given birth to two coherent patterns of ideas and values: the Enlightenment syndrome and the Romantic syndrome. Both syndromes manifest a specific style of thinking. Each syndrome originates in different assumptions and biases about fundamental knowledge and the nature of reality. My intention is to investigate both syndromes through an analysis of their preferences in their perception of reality.

If we have a better understanding of the biases of both syndromes, we may be able to comprehend the ambivalent attitude of Enlightenment humanism towards its Romantic counterpart that aspires to Illumination or, in other words, the ambivalent relation between the Classic and the Romantic mind, between ratio and intuition. This ambivalence manifests itself most markedly in the opposing views towards nature, and towards woman and man, and in a different bias towards aesthetic and epistemological principles.

Though humanists, and in consequence their humanism as a worldview, are protagonists of the Enlightenment, many humanists privately cultivate a Romantic attitude. This simultaneous existence of two value syndromes within Western (post-)modern culture, and within humanism as a worldview, creates dynamic tensions, and even conflicts.

The Classic mind and the Romantic mind foster preferences arising from opposite assumptions. Both syndromes have pronounced qualities, and have a strong appeal and a great self-evidence for anyone with an open mind and heart. Their ontological and psychological premises, however, differ profoundly. The ensuing rivalry is creative and positive, on condition that one recognizes the specific qualities and limitations of the underlying assumptions of each syndrome. The rivalry becomes unbearable and distinctly destructive when the mutual differences lead to an overall exclusion of the values of the opposite frame of mind. Communism and fascism, bastard heirs of the Enlightenment syndrome and the Romantic syndrome respectively, are a frightening example of the one-sided radicalization of the various biases. Due to its impotence to balance the Classic and the Romantic values within its own tradition, humanism as the core tradition of an open minded and tolerant Western culture was unable to bridge the gap between the opposite ideologies in the twentieth century.

Against the background of this failure, humanism ought to aspire to the reconciliation of the biases of both the Classic as well as the Romantic mind into a wider, more profound pattern of values and insights. This essay contains some

germs of such a synthesis. But the scope of my theme is so overwhelming that I would like to remind the reader of a well-known joke about a first visit to Rome. The reply to the question of where one should go in Rome, depends on how many days one wants to spend there. The answer for a one-day visit is easier to give than the answer for a week's, let alone a month's stay.

From among the many perspectives and the staggering amount of data I selected one hypothesis, a brief sketch of two aesthetic principles, and an appeal for a creative balance between the preferences of both syndromes: a renaissance of the integration of opposite values.

My hypothesis is that Renaissance humanism, in its philosophic and aesthetic tradition, embodies the range of values that split up during the eighteenth century in the Enlightenment syndrome and the Romantic syndrome. It is not the values of both syndromes that are new, but their internal organization and their relationship with each other. Modern humanism married the Enlightenment syndrome, keeping the Romantic syndrome as a mistress in the background.

I will analyze the two syndromes under the heading *A syndrome: seven axes of bias*, using W.T. Jones's (1973: 3) methodology and description of values. Let me make it clear that my hypothesis has no pretensions other than an admonition to search for a different, less linear approach of the humanist tradition. It aims to be a search light into a past that we still do not understand.

The next section, entitled *Two aesthetic principles: the sublime and the beautiful*, refers to the divorce, in the eighteenth century of the Sublime and the Beautiful. The domain of aesthetics not only mirrors the state of the arts but reveals the inner "logic", the "design" of a syndrome, i.e. a form of collective consciousness.

The concluding section, *An appeal*, calls for the transformation of humanism, not to become less enlightened or less rational but to become more illuminated. The twenty-first century may not repeat the ideological errors of the twentieth century.

A Brief History of Enlightenment

Before digging deeper into the respective value patterns of both Enlightenment and Illumination, the Romantic alternative to the Enlightenment, I want to examine, for the sake of clarity, how the Enlightenment believed in Truth with a capital T.

In *The Roots of Romanticism*, Isaiah Berlin (1999) presents three principles that characterize the Enlightenment. The first principle maintains that all real questions can be answered, because the world is intelligible. There are no mysteries that exceed our intelligence. The second principle follows logically from this first principle, viz. that responses to real questions are within the reach of humans as rational beings—on condition that they use the right method. Due to the right method, every question delivers the right answer. The third principle follows from the first two, namely that all answers are mutually compatible. This principle evokes the prospect of an all-embracing theory, unifying the existing questions and answers.

It is easy to understand why these principles were powerful enough to raise sheer enthusiasm and a belief in progress which had never before been experienced in human history. Only an unrestricted belief in the power of human reason could alter the age-old conviction that it was the ancients who possessed the key to original wisdom and fundamental knowledge. Barrow and Newton had defined time as a straight line that goes from the here-and-now into an infinite future. The mathematical definition of time broke with the Aristotelian definition of time, based upon physical movement. The ancient notion of circular time, the time of the seasons, made way for the notion of linear, future-oriented time. The new "construct" made it possible to conceive of history as a linear process. The forward movement of time supported the idea of progress. It was not the past, but the future that provided the key to understanding reality. The notion of a revolution, in the modern sense of the word, was born. Traditional rights became obsolete. The justification for their existence was a sophism, a way of defending the old regime.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment delivered the arguments that could and would transform a revolt into a revolution. A revolution is a revolt with a philosophy. A revolution arranges its own justification. It does not defend the past. It does not need the past. It only needs the future. In *La crise de la conscience Européenne*, Paul Hazard (1961) argues convincingly that Europe from 1680 to 1715 lived through a profound transformation of values, attitudes and ideas. Under the surface of Louis XIV's absolutist reign, a radical transition took place from stability to movement, from the ancients to the moderns, from the south to the north. These years saw the rise of heterodoxies, the skepticism of Pierre Bayle, the negation of miracles and oracles, the empiricism of Locke, the birth of a philosophy of natural rights and social morality, a longing for happiness on earth, a search for natural religion, sciences and progress; a new model of humanity, and so on. Hazard accurately describes the psychological and philosophical changes that, by three to four generations, preceded the political revolutions in the English colonies and France.

The new values, ideas and ideals comprised both Classic and Romantic elements. Leibniz and Newton, Rousseau and Voltaire, Blake and Ingres, Burke and Kant: the list of names of original minds, creating their oeuvre from opposite angles, is impressive and endless. It took a few decades before the dust of their ideas and values settled down, from 1820 onwards, into a number of "isms". In 1848, when revolutions broke out in Western and Central Europe, the social issue haunted the bourgeoisie from Western Europe, and the national issue shook the multi-ethnic states of Central Europe. The Classic mind and the Romantic mind were manifesting themselves in the formation of social and national ideologies successively. Their apogee in communist and fascist theories in the twentieth century revealed in both camps a one-sided, extreme vision towards a glorious future. These single-minded visions succeeded in seducing millions of people, including intellectuals, writers and artists (Lévy 1991).

The blindness of the intellectuals drove me to write this chapter. The intellectual, being, in Levy's definition, a priest who wants to mediate between the world and the universal, is not only responsible for what he believes but also for what he excludes, and, even more important, for how he believes and how he does not

believe. The one-sided vision of quite a few European intellectuals was the outcome of a short-circuiting between the Enlightenment syndrome and its Romantic counterpart. This intellectual tragedy took place in Europe, not in the United States. I wonder why. According to Conor Cruise O'Brien, Enlightenment ideas are far more solidly established in America than anywhere else because here, as nowhere else, they were firmly embedded in the massive edifice of sacral nationalism. Putting it another way, the American Enlightenment resists decay because it is pickled in holy brine (O'Brien 1995: 59).

In the American psyche, Enlightenment ideas of economic and political freedom are not opposed to nationalistic feelings. Both belong to the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the establishment of the American Constitution of 1787. Basic values of both the Classic and the Romantic syndromes strengthen each other in the collective consciousness. American universalism is the outcome of such a merger of values. Viewed from the American side, the values seem truly universal. Viewed from the outside, the values are first and foremost American.

A Syndrome: Seven Axes of Bias

In *The Romantic Syndrome* (1973) W.T. Jones uses a methodology that focuses primarily upon the style of thinking, instead of on the content of thought. One may compare this with the approach of a painter or author with an idiosyncratic style: a personal style of perception pervades the work, however different the themes might be. By assuming that the style of thinking reaches deeper than its content, Jones expresses a conviction similar to Octavio Paz in *Alternating Current,* arguing that the meaning of a poem does not lie in what the poet wanted to say, but in what the poem actually says. Content stems from form, not vice versa (Paz 1973: 6).

The truism about form and meaning (content) explains the importance of aesthetics in any worldview, religion or political institution. The state of the arts is the true expression of how one thinks and feels, and thus of the quality of life. The truism about form and meaning also applies to ethics: it is not the ethical claims that express the real intentions of the politician, but the means by which the politician wants to achieve the "lofty" aims. The means that are used to achieve ethical aims, have a similar status and function as the form of the poem with regard to its content (aim). In other words: form and means, and aims and meaning relate to each other.

Jones defines an axis of bias as a range of possible attitudes toward a pair of contrasting values (Jones 1973: 35). In order to derive a syndrome or configuration, he defines seven dimensions or axes. The seven axes provide a coherent pattern of preferences. They provide an insight into a style of thinking and feeling, while leaving enough space for a variety of personal conjectures. Jones utilizes the seven axes of bias to trace the preferences that prevail in the arts and the sciences, poetry, metaphysics, and political theory. My contention is that these biases, or preferences, are reflected in and influence the nature of scientific and philosophical theories, as well as the nature of poems, paintings, and other works of art (Jones 1973: 3). In contrast to the level of content, an analysis in

terms of style-preferences is intended to go deeper and to uncover an even more fundamental set of distinguishing characteristics of theoretical behavior patterns (Jones 1973: 13).

The relevance of this methodology for a study of worldviews lies in its capacity to unveil deep-rooted aspirations and convictions, before entering the path of conceptual analyses. The method is an excellent tool for comparative studies, either between collectives or between individuals. Jones uses the word "syndrome" when a pattern of biases predominates in a group, and the word "configuration" when in an individual. In order to analyze the Classic mind and the Romantic mind, or the Enlightenment syndrome and the Romantic one, I will briefly summarize the specific traits of each of the axes, followed by Jones's summaries of the syndromes.

The Order-Disorder Axis

The order-disorder axis deals with a preference for system, clarity and structure versus anarchy, complexity and fluidity. Other names for similar categories are bureaucracy-anarchy (William James), regularity-irregularity, or form-formlessness. The Classic mind prefers system, clarity and structure, while the Romantic mind is inclined toward anarchy, complexity and fluidity. There are of course differences in the degree of structure versus the degree of fluidity. Carnap is more "structured" than Russell while Bergson is more "fluid" than Sartre. But the philosophies of Carnap and Russell belong to the Classic syndrome, while those of Bergson and Sartre belong to the Romantic syndrome.

The Static-Dynamic Axis

This axis crosses the order-disorder axis. Clearly a preference for order often implies a preference for the static, as in the philosophy of Plato. Often, but not necessarily, especially not since Barrow and Newton defined time as a straight line, stretching from the here-and-now into the infinite. Hegel, Marx and Comte try to combine the dynamic approach of an evolutionary concept of time with a system of thought in which order predominates, while Bergson rejects order within his dynamic perspective.

Jones remarks that the doctrine of internal, dialectical relations in the philosophy of Hegel can best be understood (indeed, can only be understood!) as a device to reconcile these conflicting tendencies verbally (Jones 1973: 24). Marx's economic and political philosophy is another attempt to reconcile the historically determined class struggles (dynamic) with a longing for a classless society, beyond the order of historical time (static). The values of freedom, equality and brotherhood are still equally shared by the Classic and the Romantic mind. For instance, Beethoven's ninth symphony, ending in the apotheosis *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*, precedes Marx's writings. Within the context of this chapter, the only relevant question is how one thinks one can achieve this lofty aim.

The Continuity-Discreteness Axis

According to Jones, this axis reflects divergent attitudes toward unity and plurality. He quotes C.S. Lewis's criticism, made in 1946, of William Blake, an avowedly Romantic artist and author:

> "Blake wrote the *Marriage of heaven and hell.* If I have written of their Divorce, this is because the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based upon the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable 'either-or'; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error." (Jones 1973: 24).

Although Lewis's statement deals primarily with a form of dualism instead of with unity and plurality, it touches the core of my chapter. The continuity-discreteness axis runs from Arne Naess's postulate of *the ultimate unity of all living beings* to Russell's radical pluralism, i.e. the separate existence of everything there is. Since Plato and Christianity, Western philosophy and culture have been deeply dualistic, oriented toward the Beyond. The secularization process, initiated by late Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers, contributed, truly enough, towards an orientation in the here-and-now, but an age-old Christian dualism continues within the here-and-now under the dual form of Enlightenment and Romantic syndromes. It shows once more that the style or form of thinking—*how* we think—says more about the depth structure of a culture or an individual than about *what* is thought. The influence of Eastern philosophies and a growing ecological awareness will probably promote the appreciation for continuity within the debate on ontological questions (Schwab 1984).

The Inner-Outer Axis

This axis indicates contrasting value-attitudes between those who are satisfied with a relatively external relation to the objects of their experience and those who are satisfied only if they can, as it were, get inside them (Jones 1973: 25). Within the context of this axis, Jones quotes Dewey's criticism of traditional empiricism and traditional rationalism as "spectator"-theories of knowledge. A similar difference between external and internal is manifest in the use of intuition. Descartes uses intuition as a searchlight in order to see objects "clearly and distinctly" but from the outside, while Bergson uses his intuition to grasp the inner nature of reality (Jones 1973: 27).

The Sharp Focus-Soft Focus Axis

This axis refers to notions and images that are distinct and clear versus notions and images that allow atmosphere and threshold experiences, and of course everything in between. Jones cites Russell who mentions that his colleague and

friend Whitehead once said to him: "You think the world is what it looks like in fine weather at noonday; I think it is what it seems like in the early morning when one first wakes from sleep" (Jones 1973: 29). Whitehead's statement shows once more, as is also the case with the other axes, that a preference for sharp or soft focus is not a question of proof but of an emotional and mental attitude that subsequently argues for its point of view.

The This World-Other World Axis

This axis assumes a great variety of forms. A preference for this world, according to Jones, usually expresses contentment with the here-and-now, and the conviction that this world is self-explanatory. A preference for the other world refuses to believe that this world is self-explanatory. In general, a bias toward discreteness permits a sharp distinction to be drawn between this world and the other world - there will be a tendency towards some form of dualism. But a bias towards continuity requires the thinker to close the gap in one way or other; accordingly, changes will be rung on the relations between "appearance" and "reality" (Jones 1973: 33; 36).

The Spontaneity-Process Axis

This axis turns around the bias for chance, freedom or accident in nature and society versus orderliness and the lawfulness of things. Jones quotes the historian H.A.L. Fisher who held the "one safe rule for the historian to be that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen". Philosophers of history, on the other hand, tend to have a fairly strong process bias: whether they conceive the order as organic, mechanical, linear, or cyclical, they all play down contingency and spontaneity (Jones 1973: 34-35).

A Summary of Renaissance, Enlightenment and Romantic Syndromes

After all too brief description of the seven axes, I want to outline their pattern with regard to the Renaissance syndrome (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), the Enlightenment syndrome (first half of the eighteenth century), and the Romantic syndrome (second half of the eighteenth century). The summary of the three syndromes provides the reader with the opportunity to compare the position of today's humanism with regard to these syndromes. I quote Jones:

> "My hypothesis is that in the Renaissance syndrome the following pattern tended to predominate: 1) strongly marked: sharp-focus bias; this-world bias; 2) marked, but less strongly so: discreteness bias; spontaneity bias; outer bias; dynamic bias; 3) possibly shifting during period: order bias from disorder (Montaigne) to order (Hobbes and Descartes)."

> "My hypothesis is that it [the Enlightenment Syndrome, FE] had the following pattern: 1) strongly marked: sharp-focus; order bias; discreteness bias; static bias; outer bias; this-world bias; 2) ambivalent on the spontaneity-process axis."

> "I suggest that a wholly different pattern of biases emerged rapidly during the last decades of the eighteenth century, a pattern which had the following characteristics: 1) strongly marked: disorder bias; soft-focus bias; dynamic bias; inner bias; other-world bias; 2) very strongly marked continuity bias, which appears in two forms: a) self-transcendence, or submergence of the individual in the whole (this appears, for instance, as pantheism in religion and in the cult of nationalism in politics), and b) self-dominance, or submergence of the whole in the individual (this appears as solipsism in metaphysics, as radical individualism in ethics, and in the cult of the hero); 3) ambivalent on the spontaneity-process axis" (Jones 1973: 111; 117-118).

Jones's Renaissance Syndrome Revisited

The Renaissance syndrome, sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries in Jones's dating, shows a more positive attitude towards the dynamic bias, the spontaneity bias, and initially the disorder bias than the Enlightenment syndrome. But furthermore, the transition from the Renaissance syndrome to the Enlightenment syndrome seems to evolve organically, to use a "Romantic" concept. The differences between the two syndromes are moderate. However, if one were to include the fifteenth century within Jones's Renaissance, especially the last decades, a different balance along several axes would emerge. For instance, Botticelli, Ficino and Pico della Mirandola occupy different positions from Montaigne and Erasmus on several axes, and very different positions from Hobbes and Descartes. Their *Quattrocento* humanism is more an attitude and a lifestyle than an elaborated systematic philosophy; it is more a philosophy of beauty than one of morality. Their Renaissance humanism, moreover, is profane and sacred: the relationship between the profane and the sacred is not a mutual opposition, but rather a complementary relationship. The visible and the invisible reality are each others" mirror image (Elders 1993: 36; see also Yates 1979; Thomas 1971). If we include the *Quattrocento* in Jones's Renaissance syndrome, and historically one is obliged to do so, the difference between the Renaissance syndrome and the Enlightenment syndrome becomes more obvious. Incorporating the fifteenth century would mean the bias on several axes would shift towards the middle, especially on the inner-outer axis; this world-other world axis, and the continuity-discreteness axis. For instance, the Neoplatonist Ficino fostered a strong continuity bias instead of a discreteness bias. His student and friend Pico took a middle position, endeavoring to promote a *pax philosophica* based upon the perennial wisdom of all written and available sources, independent of their origin (Elders 1996: 42). Under the influence of the continuity bias, the sharp-focus bias would be less pronounced, or even end towards the soft-focus bias. The Italian Renaissance showed a great interest in the presentation of a dynamic balance between opposite poles, for example between Mars and Venus. Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo, Veronese, Francesco Cossa painted this subject with great care and imagination, attributing to Venus the task of taming and balanc-

ing the physical, lustful power of Mars. A similar dynamic equilibrium is present in the subject of the three Graces on many coins and paintings. The theme of the three Graces is related to an ancient triadic tradition, such as the three positions of the moon; Osiris, Isis and Horus, or the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in Christianity. These themes are important within the context of my hypothesis because they show the interest and the talent to deal with oppositions, instead of single biases. Order and disorder; static and dynamic; inner and outer; this world and that world are each other's complements. An analysis of the space-time dimension in the Primavera of Botticelli shows not only that space and time are one, but also that the movement of Zephyr in the left corner, and of Mercury in the right corner symbolizes the omnipresence of Eros, not only in humans, but in the entire cosmos (Elders 2000c: 95).

The theme of an omnipresent Eros, the notion of an organic, living nature is anathema to the mechanistic worldview of the Enlightenment but of great interest to the founders of the Romantic syndrome such as August Wilhelm Schlegel. E.T.A. Hoffmann, Casper David Friedrich, Philip Otto Runge, Beethoven, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, and Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt. According to Cor Blok, these philosophers, scientists and artists created, within one generation, the German Romantic syndrome (Elders 2000c: 261). While, from the sixteenth century onwards, Protestant ministers and scientists banned magic in a common effort, although for different reasons and opposite arguments (devil versus reason), Romanticism would show interest in Nature as an organic, living whole, following a longstanding tradition, dating back via the Renaissance to Europe's prehistory. Couliano has ventured the thesis that "the transition from a society dominated by magic to a predominantly scientific society is explicable by a change in the imaginary" (Couliano 1987: xix). The change in the imaginary since the Renaissance implies a change in the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious: "The relationship between the conscious and the unconscious has been deeply altered and our ability to control our own process of imagination reduced to nothing" (Couliano 1987: xix).

These few examples do of course not prove my hypothesis that the biases and values of the Renaissance divorced in two opposite syndromes in the eighteenth century. But the continuation of values and certain guiding ideas of the Renaissance syndrome, partly in the Enlightenment and partly in the Illumination and Romantic syndrome, is quite evident. The *Quattrocento* showed preferences by which it positions itself between both the biases of the Enlightenment and the Romantic syndrome. The *Quattrocento* had a positive attitude to both poles on the seven axes. During my research on this topic it struck me that we encounter the same values three hundred years later. However, their internal organization and their mutual relationship in two opposite syndromes are different. The equilibrium of the *Quattrocento* has given place to two opposing syndromes. We have entered a new era, in which the bourgeois class shows all the signs of a schizoid mind, believing in the Enlightenment values during daytime while fostering the Romantic values at night (De Quincy 1821). How can such a profound change be explained in a nutshell? The transformation of values within the Renaissance syndrome, bridging three hundred years from the end of the fourteenth until the end of the seventeenth century, is a development in value

consciousness in favor of the biases of the Enlightenment. This transformation and the subsequent dichotomy of a whole range of values are unavoidable, because of the impressive results of Newtonian physics. The Newtonian worldview had become the physical embodiment of an explainable, therefore predictable and discrete order; oriented toward this world, i.e. the mechanical outer world. It possessed a sharp focus, relying upon a process-philosophy that is self-explanatory, excluding chance in a cosmos that is fully determined and law-obedient. But the opposite values continued to flourish in hermetic traditions: in alchemy, in the Rosicrucians and in Freemasonry. *The magic flute* of the freemasons Mozart and Schikaneder was and still is an inspiring example of the Illumination tradition, contemporary to the Enlightenment (Van den Berk 2000: 67-90).

Two Aesthetic Principles: The Sublime and the Beautiful

The bifurcation in the eighteenth century of values, still simultaneously present in the Renaissance syndrome, is also visible in the separation of the aesthetic principles of the Sublime and the Beautiful. The Classicist tradition, defended by the Ancients in the quarrel between Moderns and Ancients during the last part of the seventeenth century, considered the sublime as the highest stage in the domain of the beautiful. The Classicist tradition based its aesthetic criteria on Plato's philosophy of beauty. Plato distinguished four forms and stages of beauty - the beauty of the body; moral beauty; intellectual beauty, and absolute beauty. In Plato's worldview the sublime coincides with the highest stage of beauty: the Absolute. The Absolute is the One, incorporating the Idea of Beauty, Truth and Goodness. Plato's Idea of Goodness coincided, centuries later, with the Christian notion of God. Platonism and Neoplatonism deeply influenced the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. For seventeenth-century Classicist authors like Boileau and Bossuet, Beauty was the splendor of Truth and Goodness (Elders 2001: 30-31). The notion of the Sublime as the highest stage of beauty gave way in the eighteenth century to a different, more subjective and emotional domain of experiences. Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), interpreted the sublime as a manifestation of power and intensity. Intensity cannot be reached without a certain amount of pain and terror. If pain and terror are tempered in order not to damage the person; if it does not lead to violence or the physical destruction of the person, then pain and terror are able to provide pleasure, a delightful horror. To the extent that horror is also a sign of self-preservation and survival, it is one of the strongest emotions. The proper aim of horror is the sublime. Joachim von der Thüsen (1977) remarked that Burke made intensity the graduator of aesthetic quality, a conviction that De Sade would utilize to introduce a physiology of sado-masochism. To Burke, the mission of art was to arouse and to affect the passions. From these criteria it follows that the sublime becomes more important than the beautiful because its main characteristic is intensity. The resemblance between Boileau and Burke is that the sublime is, for both, the most powerful dimension of the beautiful, but the comparison ends here. It is difficult to imagine a deeper abyss between Boileau's metaphysical projection of the sublime as the highest stage of beauty and Burke's physiological

presentation of the sublime. In addition to Burke, Kant too made a qualitative distinction between the principles of the Sublime and the Beautiful. Kant separated the sublime from the beautiful by attributing a new, autonomous place to the sublime. In *Die Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), Kant raises the question of why aesthetic judgments are not only based upon feelings but are also universally valid. At first sight, personal feelings and universal validity seem to exclude each other. Kant, however, reasons from two perspectives. Feelings are important in a judgment of taste, because they cause immediate delight. But the other perspective is that the delight is without self-interest. We do not desire to possess the delight, even the question of its existence is not central. If aesthetic delight is disinterested, it may be shared universally. Kant's analysis is interesting, because the universality of an aesthetic judgment does not become objective through its universality, but remains subjective. Kant also distinguished clearly between a judgment about the beautiful and a judgment about the sublime. In contrast to the beautiful that presents itself beyond our reason as an object of necessary pleasure, the sublime presents itself in nature as the opposite of any aim. It cannot exist in any tangible form, but only speaks to our reason that mediates between our feelings and the formlessness of some parts of nature. The sublime is first of all an experience, not a material quality. The infinity of the sublime remains a barrier for our sense-bound intuition. The sublime obliges us to conceive of nature in its totality without being able to achieve this reproduction objectively (Elders 2001: 34; Von der Thüsen 1997). We also see here a profound gap between the Classicist vision of Boileau and the vision of Kant. In Kant's philosophy, the transcendental, i.e. the a priori categories, determines how reality can manifest itself to the human mind. In other words, reality adapts itself to the innate mind categories of the human consciousness. This was a revolution, no less important than Copernicus's was. The gravitational force of the sublime comes down from the sky to the human mind, to manifest itself in the pain and terror of the human body. This marks a major shift in Western philosophy. From now on, the sublime belonged not primarily to the world of God, an independent transcendent world, but to the world of the human mind and the human body. I consider this shift as a return to the this-world view of the Greek and Romans, although this was not Kant's view. The Ancients distinguished between the sublime and the beautiful but did not feel the necessity to draw a priori distinctions between this world and another world.

Once More the Sublime and the Beautiful - Their Interrelationship

Etymologically, the sublime means "that which lies beneath the threshold", in a larger sense "what lies beyond a border". The sublime explores the height and the depth of the human mind. It circles around a border, while beauty accepts a border (Elders 2001: 28). The intimate relationship between the sublime and the beautiful goes back to Greek and Roman times. The sublime incorporated everything that was highest in nature or godlike. Longinus, an unknown author from the first century A.D., writes in *Peri hupsous* extensively on the sublime, characterizing it with literary examples, and defining it as the highest possible:

> ".... All that is really great will not be exhausted by contemplation, and it is difficult, no, even impossible to offer resistance to it. The memory of it is strong and nearly ineffaceable ... The sublime is the resonance of the greatness of mind. It is because of this greatness that sometimes also only the thought in itself arouses admiration, without being expressed in words, just because of the greatness of mind" (Elders 2001: 29).

The sublime in the Greek tragedies originates from a depersonalization of the individual tragedy of an *Oedipus* or *Medea.* The sublime does not coincide with the beautiful, i.e. the order of the positive, well-ordered life, giving aesthetic satisfaction. But the sublime is also not alien to the beautiful, as in Kant's philosophy. The principles of the sublime and the beautiful coexist within the same worldview. They complement each other. The question of how the sublime and the beautiful relate to each other can only be answered by viewing the two principles within their psychological and philosophical contexts.

If we investigate the position of the sublime on the seven axes of Jones within a Platonic-Christian context, we may tentatively draw the following conclusions. The sublime refers in this tradition to the highest possible, divine, eternal, static order that belongs (by definition) to another world than this world, where the soul reaches its ultimate happiness, i.e. unity. Reaching final unity refers not only to the value of continuity but also to the inner world as the real one. The inner reality is a world with a soft focus, because no human being is able to perceive threshold experience sharply. The rapture of the soul implies that there is a fusion of both poles on the spontaneity-process axis. For the rapture belongs to an experience of spontaneity; the process to the all-pervading divine light. If we compare the biases of the Platonic-Christian aesthetics with the biases of the Enlightenment syndrome, we may conclude that they share a preference for a grandiose order, outside the human realm. But there is also a striking difference. The Platonic-Christian aesthetics desires to reach a unity with the divine that reminds us of the Romantic syndrome, especially its continuity and inner-world orientation. In other words, the Platonic-Christian worldview returns with its deepest aspirations to both the Enlightenment syndrome and to the Romantic syndrome.

But what happens if we investigate the sublime on the seven axes of Jones in the context of the Greek tragedies, or of Shakespeare's plays? In the pagan context, there is no transcendent world of Ideas, nor is there a Trinity with heavenly angels. All there is, is blindness and sorrow. Disorder and anarchy reign in the world of Sophocles and Shakespeare. There is no escape for the personae Oedipus or Hamlet. The outer world leads to the destruction of their inner world, and vice versa. There is within this world no refuge into another world. Fate and chance are supreme on the spontaneity-process axis, as is plurality on the continuity-discreteness axis. The dynamics are appearance, because fate determines the outcome. There is a sharp focus for the audience, but not for the victims. The victims walk toward their destiny, while only the audience realizes what is going to happen and why it happens. In Greek tragedies, as in the plays of Shakespeare, the sublime evokes the experience of the beyond, but this is a beyond full of drama. There is no salvation outside the human realm. The sublime

destroys the daily order of life, manifesting a dark side, the not-known, the presence of terror and blind fate. Humans seem unable to guide their life in a meaningful way. They are caught in self-contradictions. The sublime destroys whatever is left of beauty. Chance and the law of cause and effect seem to reign arbitrarily in the world of the heroes and the heroines.

The tragic world does not belong to the Enlightenment syndrome. If anywhere, the tragic sense of life belongs to the Romantic one. The early Romantics believed that they were living in a world of prose, no longer in a world of poetry (Heller 1984: 1-19). The world of the Romantics is a dualistic world, not by choice or desire, but through the loss of contact with the gods, with nature, with a past they considered to be poetic. The dualism of the Romantic is not a dualism by conviction, but stems from the longing for unity on the continuity-discreteness axis, and for an inner world in the here-and-now. They believe in the catharsis function of the arts, following Aristotle. In his *Poetica*, Aristotle unfolds a catharsis theory in which he evaluates the effects of the tragedy upon the audience. He argues that compassion and fear purify emotions, aroused by the tragic events. With his theory Aristotle rejects Plato's interpretation that the tragedy has an immoral effect upon the audience. Plato had to believe this, because his understanding of the One does not allow for creative tensions in the process of reaching a more ultimate insight. In *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) Georg Steiner draws our attention to the fact that tragedy as a form of drama is not universal, although all humans are conscious of the tragedy of life. But acting out personal drama in an amphitheater or theatre is only a characteristic of Western tradition. The tragic sense of life, the violence, the unexpected, the blindness of the personae belong to the world of the sublime; the beautiful belongs to the world of rightful proportions and balance. The sublime and the beautiful are inextricably linked to each other, assuming the other's existence and complementing each other. German Romantics believed in the cathartic function of the arts. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, for example, in his re-interpretation of Aristotle, associated terror with compassion: the spectator must, through terror and emotion, become receptive to the suffering of another. On the same score, at the end of the eighteenth century Schiller could foster the hope that the theatre would become a place of sublimity and catharsis, eminently suited to cultivate the sentiments which the future moral society needs (Heijne 1997: 34-35). Because it doesn't exclude the domain of the sublime, the Romantic syndrome is better suited to explore the unconscious and contradictory tendencies of the human psyche than the Enlightenment syndrome, without having to succumb to fatalism.

An Appeal

The Berlin Wall (1989), the Twin Towers (2001) and the Euro (2002) symbolize profound changes in our age. So do the ongoing wars. The question is, in which direction(s). One can sense the need for a renewed reflection on the values of Western culture, especially since September 11, 2001, and the Enron scandal. Within the context of my contribution to *Empowering Humanity*, I wonder how the contemporary humanist worldview might contribute to this reflection. In or-

der to respond to this question, we have to realize what the strong points of the humanist tradition are, and what the weak ones are. Historically speaking, the strong points are the Stoic notion of humanity as the primary source for ethical and juridical reflections, and the reliance of human beings on their own understanding. The freedom of speech, of the sciences and the arts, and the moral autonomy of the individual follow from the golden rule that the individual has to justify his behavior in front of an (imaginary) humanity. The highest authority for Diogenes the Cynic was his own independent judgment, independent of the other human fellows, but also independent of all kinds of desires. Diogenes combined Socrates and the Buddha, both the embodiment of a humanist philosophy in two different traditions: a Western and an Eastern tradition (Elders 2000a). We may summarize the tradition of Diogenes in the notions of freedom and brother-sisterhood, perhaps more than in the notion of equality, although equality might be viewed as a political consequence of a synthesis of freedom and solidarity.

Humanism as an emerging worldview identified itself as going far with the Enlightenment as a philosophical, political and economic movement. Striking examples of the application of the normative ideas of the Enlightenment are the American and French Constitutions at the end of the eighteenth century. The Founders of the American constitution were freemasons. The freemasons in the eighteenth century may be called humanists, as still happens today in countries like France and Belgium, although not in the Netherlands. There is an inextricable pattern of ideas and values without clear boundaries between the various groups. But there are also deep gaps between the various parties. For example, the interest of the freemasons for an ancient hermetic tradition is forbidden fruit for those humanists who foster a positivist outlook on humans and nature. Here the trouble starts. The majority of humanists in 2002 have identified themselves with too narrow an interpretation of the Enlightenment syndrome, leaving the Romantic syndrome in the shadow. By doing so, they become the prisoners of a schizoid value-system in contemporary Western culture. A debate on humanism, spirituality and esotericism in Berlin, 1993 between Paul Kurtz and Fons Elders illustrates such a difference in evaluation and orientation (Elders 1996: 145-167). A humanism that identifies itself as going a long way with a positivist philosophy, deprives itself of the intellectual and emotional opportunity to appreciate its Renaissance heritage as a living heritage, present today in the values of both the Enlightenment and the Illumination. Such a humanism also denies itself access to non-Western cultures, with their wisdom, traditions and various different lifestyles. This one-sidedness has proved to be dangerous in the twentieth century, both in Europe and in the world at large. It will prove to be even more dangerous in the twenty-first century. Economic globalization without a cultural understanding of the qualities of the various different cultures is a time bomb. More than two hundred years ago, Western bourgeois culture opted for modernization while fostering the old, magic values in their opera houses and museums. Aesthetics became more important than religion. This process took several generations, but didn't last long enough to generate an integrated pattern of traditional and modern values. It ended in ideological deadlock between communist and fascist ideologies. How can we expect other

cultures and societies to undergo a process of modernization without running similar risks?
Since time became a straight line with only one direction, namely the future, humanism has invested and projected all its energy and hope into the future, sharing this dream in the nineteenth century with ideologies such as liberalism and Marxism. *A brief history of the Enlightenment* presented the view that communism and fascism are the bastard heirs of the Enlightenment and Romantic syndromes, each a one-sided constellation of already existing values. It was not primarily the values as such, but the one-sidedness and the extremism of their values that proved to be fatal for millions of people. What a difference in mentality between those twentieth century ideologues in comparison with many Renaissance humanists, who often combined the love of empirical data with an intuition for an all embracing order behind the empirical data. Who fostered mathematics as a new tool for the sciences, while cherishing its symbolic beauty? Who combined the interest for chemical and physical experiments, with the experience of nature as a living whole? Who combined the aspiration for a harmonious order with an affinity for naturalness and spontaneity? In the words of Támás Ungvári:

> "We need to know that the correction to the failures of modern rationalism is an inspiration of the 'irrational', of the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance. That's the only corrective. Whether the whole story of our Western civilization is not civilization and its discontent, but the constant self-correction of rationalism by its only begotten opponent, that is, the beautiful irrationality of the belief in the unity of nature, in the belief of the unity of mankind, in the belief of some kind of esoteric mysticism that should inspire rationalism itself. I know that this is an old Kantean question, but unless the question is fully addressed, we would be at a loss" (Elders 1996: 138).

In this plea for a constant self-correction of rationalism, Támás Ungvári poses with Kant the question of the relationship between the universal and the individual. I believe that there is an intimate relationship between the aspiration of the individual to liberate himself from the social and political bonds of his society, and the quest for universal values. No individual in any society whatsoever, traditional or modern, can truly aspire to achieve a wider field of understanding without cutting those bonds that force him, unconsciously and intently, to limit his vision to that of an in-group versus an out-group. This is equally true for American suburban dwellers as for British and German skinheads, struggling with their fear of the alien by fighting with newcomers and strangers, as well as for fundamentalist Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Exactly at the crossing point of different lifestyles, a new, different notion of humanness can arise. Universal consciousness in relation to humans drinks from the intuitive source of mutual recognition, whatever the difference may be. In our times, the artists are usually the ones who explore the human psyche and realities beyond their own language and nationality. Their strategy is not a theoretical analysis of the problem, but a range of observations and experiences, how it must feel to live in the skin of someone else. Theatre, movie, literature, sport and, above all, music are the laboratories of the new world citizen. In practice, Western civilization is far re-

moved from the ideal of world citizenship, obsessed as it is by what C.B. Macpherson called “a possessive individualism”.

Humanists today are unable to renew their society because they are caught in the same dualism as the bourgeois class was in the last two centuries. A requisite for the development of a more integral, universal vision is the reconciliation of the Enlightenment and the Romantic syndromes. The re-integration of the sublime and the beautiful will follow as a natural result.