

# Prelude

Eugène Vermeer

Since the dawn of time, man has been in close contact with his immediate environment and has focused on what was available in nature. The type of human with the best adaptation potential dominated and spread across the world. A new way of thinking, the cognitive revolution, as described by Yuval Noah Harari in the book *Sapiens* (Harari Y.N. , 2017), has contributed to the fact that modern humans have been able to maintain themselves increasingly well. Language and communication played an essential role in this. This led to shifts in socialisation and behaviour, taught humans to act more purposefully, make plans and, through cooperation, develop new techniques as well as exchange survival strategies. The environment was leading and human adaptation was mainly following its developments.

Since the industrial revolution, these adaptive skills have been increasingly called upon. In the current climate, we are living in with increasing global population growth and we are faced with complex issues concerning our living environment: food, environment, work and housing. The approach is made more difficult by the fact that thinking and working together is clouded by widely divergent social and economic interests. The speed and complexity of the developments and changes we have brought about, especially ourselves, mean that we are faced with new and profound challenges. There is a need to guide ourselves in adaptation by stimulating and developing skills, in addition to adapting our thinking patterns and ways of thinking. Are we able to take control in order to realign our thinking and acting with our source; our environment, and to redirect the Self in our evolutionary development? What is needed for a constructive adjustment, a step forward in this evolutionary process? How do we get back to talking about this, in dialogue with the other? We have to go back to our original motives of exploring our living environment, but certainly also in ourselves, in the role of thinking and acting. What do we need? What can we do ourselves?

Stimulating the courage to be different and authentic. From our instinctive drives, we initially seek safety in the group and its familiar patterns, and we want to merge into the whole. It takes talent and drive to dare to be different and to dare to distinguish yourself and still be part of the whole. From authenticity and autonomous thinking, we may be better able to activate critical thinking in ourselves and to deviate from group assumptions and influence. Through constructive critical thinking about the world around us we can better free ourselves from oppressive group pressure and collective assumptions that may inhibit an open-minded approach to renewal and change.

If we want to explore new paths, we will have to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, be bold enough to take the risk of failure and make use of the power of vulnerability as described in the book of the same name by B. Brown (Brown 2012). This forms the basis to explore, to have an eye for another perspective, to listen sincerely to the other. Only then can we more deeply exchange our real feelings without the fear of being different and thinking differently. 'Improve the world, ask a question!' is one of the precepts that Rutger Bregman describes in his book *Humankind* (Bregman 2019). The contemporary perspective is often focused on resilience and achievement, on profit and growth, on dominance and personal gain. This leads to a culture of judgement and growth at the expense of others. This is not growth and development from common interest by stimulating cooperation, authenticity and autonomous thinking, but growth and development at the expense of the other and our surroundings. This socially, politically and economically stimulated attitude irrevocably leads to pathological interpersonal relationships, between both individuals and groups. We only have to look at the growing figures for burn-out, stress, anxiety and hardening within many societies. Trench

warfare is being fought between people on the basis of ingrained, hardened and imposed assumptions. It is time for an adjustment - a paradigm shift - in which attention is paid to communication, morality, creativity, critical and autonomous thinking free from fixed assumptions in sincere dialogue with our environment, and our fellow man.

With this book we want to enter into a dialogue with the reader, share and challenge you in your thinking and acting, your ability to act. A guide to the development of the Self, based on attention to the perspective of the Other; reaching yourself through the Other. If we realise the necessity of this and are able to reinforce it in upbringing, education and cooperation, we can set off. Taking this path is the first step towards change. We want to highlight different approaches from different disciplines to inspire, motivate and engage in dialogue.

# Prologue

Bert Zwaneveld

During the summer of 2020, when the first corona-wave seemed to be over as many people thought, Erwin Sengers took the initiative to ask a number of people if they were willing to think about a contribution to a book which:

- Is directed to the public debate, and is aimed at a broad audience.
- Will be a document that provides insight into the greatest problems of today – not the least of these being communication
- Shows that these problems can be solved in an alternative way than the usual one.

Every reader of this book must now be asking: “So what are these problems then?”

Our society is confronted with a lot of issues. The following, far from a complete list, provides an indication:

- Crises, such as the financial crisis of 2008 – 2014, or the Covid-19 crisis that started in 2020
- Uncertainty people feel, for instance the consequence of such a crisis or climate change
- Loss of control of people’s lives, induced by the management approach at work, or in society
- The way government treats its citizens, leading to a growing gap between the two
- Considering society as a market which often means withdrawal of the government
- More individualism which sometimes divides societies.

It seems as if people’s moral compass is not functioning well any more. Higher values no any longer direct people’s behaviour. The authors of the chapters of this book are convinced that it is necessary to re-think the fundamental aspects of our society on local, regional, national, and international levels. The keyword is here: community. In a community one can contribute to the happiness of others and by doing so to one’s own happiness. In other words: not exclusion, but rather, an exchange of ideas.

Our society consists of both people and environment. The context of people’s lives is an inherent part of the society. As a consequence, in the process of change, our relation to the material aspects of the environment should also have an important place.

Besides a change in attitude, it also is necessary to re-think what knowledge and skills are appropriate to make this happen.

In all the chapters of this book the authors analyse, the problems from their own areas of expertise,, discuss their analysis and give directions for concrete solutions. The analyses come from a broad range of disciplines: philosophy, economy, morality, (self-)organisation, innovation, psychology and education, especially on university (of applied sciences) level.

To give an outlook of what can be expected, we present here some very condensed summaries of the ten chapters.

The opening chapter is an interview of Gabriel van den Brink by Erwin Sengers: *Basically that mountain top reaches into the sky*. It shows the views of Van den Brink on questions such as: Why is it difficult to act? What is the role of language in acting? Where or when are other people needed in acting? How can someone overcome some inertia in acting? What if besides collective action there is also collective powerlessness? How realistic are the presented ideas? What is the role of education? Van den Brink and Sengers want to provide action directed perspectives. They pay special attention to the huge use of mobile technology which might lead to the restriction of people’s communication.

In chapter 2, *Time for a paradigm shift*, Leen Paape analyses that the economic paradigm on which most countries rely, which can be summarised as ‘neo-liberalism’, as no longer being tenable. This

paradigm brought prosperity and growth, but it also has harmful effects. Think of climate change, declining biodiversity, and societal consequences as growing inequalities between groups of people. So, the paradigm has to shift. He shows which choices we have to make.

Chapter 3, *Ecosystems for Education*, Erwin Sengers describes how educational systems might, or even should, change when they wish to put collaboration and collective success on a prominent place. The author's plea is to connect such a change with what can be learned from nature, in all its aspects. Nature has existed for much longer than human kind! According to Sengers: no longer is the focus on institutes that provide education, but on educational systems. The keywords of educational systems are: self-organisation, cocreation, collaboration, non-linear learning, decentralised leadership.

Gabriel van de Brink and Erwin Sengers, state in chapter 4, *Imagining an anchoring morality in the search for what binds us*, that our human existence is determined by the interaction of three pillars: morality, power and market. In their view, the first is the weakest developed of these three. In a sort of discussion they search for ways that morality can be improved. One of their conclusions is that we can replace hierarchy with a functional order in which decision-making takes place on a local or regional scale. Then, the government should not limit itself to imposing formal procedures but encourage its citizens to find their own solutions when it comes to conflicting interests or moral considerations.

Jacqueline E. van Muijlwijk-Koezen & Peter van der Sijde start their considerations in chapter 5, *Building bridges, role of authenticity*, from their observation that many students do not get academic jobs after university, but rather business related jobs. They are educated to acquire knowledge, not to make money, the core of business. Their aim is to build a bridge between academia and business from an educational point of view. Their main recommendation is that university teachers should get more insight in the world of business by asking questions aiming at familiarity with this world.

Chapter 6 by Sabrina Schork, *Circular Innovator Education, why the world needs to educate circular economy thinkers & doers*, is about circular innovation in order to create a cross-border program for Circular Economy Innovators in Public Higher Education. It is based on a review of 107 scientific peer-reviewed articles and analysis of 40 shortlisted publications and online searches for Circular Economy research projects. Eight interesting research initiatives and eight publications give insights on Circular Innovation Education. The core knowledge gained is relevant for scientists, trainers, human resource managers, and people who want to continue their education in the Circular Innovation area. Circular economy is the future and circular innovations should be implemented by education. This implies finding people who can carry these out, who will be trained, and who can play a role in the (commercial) implementations.

Jaap Boonstra begins chapter 7, *Let's play*, with: "Many people in organisations experience their environment as dynamic, and it is unclear what the future will be." In such an unsure situation, preparing the future by a planned process is hardly possible. Boonstra's alternative is self-organisation in which playing has an important role. In shaping the future players should form self-organising collectives which are not aiming at a well-defined outcomes with pre-defined targets per se. The keywords, besides self-organisation, are: change, communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, (mutual) trust, learning, ownership, and even fun.

Jan Bransen's chapter 8, *I can't do it on my own*, asks: "What does it mean to maintain our identity as a specimen of *Homo sapiens*? And what does it require to survive as humanity, as the species that is seemingly destroying its environment in the Anthropocene, and that does not really appear to be entitled to claim the wisdom that it has attributed to itself in its name. To discuss these questions, I will be making good use of the five following basic concepts: *autopoiesis*, adaptivity, commitment, activity, and temporality."

Chapter 9 by Eugène Vermeer, *Autonomy as an attitude to life, the development of Autonoia*, focuses on the importance of autonomous thinking in the tsunami of information, truthful or fake, and everything in between. Everyone has to find their path in the complex world we live in, sometimes alone, mostly in a relationship with others. In this complex situation everyone also has the duty to build up their own Self. Education and the development of thinking are the central topics. Vermeer uses the term 'Autonoia' - from Greek: self (auto) and thinking (noia) for the development of underlying skills and attitude of autonomous thinking.

In the closing chapter, *DRYVER'S SEAT*, Erwin Sengers extensively discusses: "Although we have the technology, the knowledge, and the skills to provide all people with the necessities of life and to adapt to changing circumstances, our capacity to act is currently not sufficient to solve the greater challenges of our time." And, of course, he provides a lot of insights about possible solutions.