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McNamee

Adventure Activity,
Prudent Power and Risk

Introduction

That there are people in the world who are interested in risk and risk-taking would surprise no-one I venture. That there should be such a thing as the philosophy of sport, and a well-established tradition of scholarship in it, surprises most academics I meet.¹ That there might be philosophers, professionally interested in adventure, risk and risk-taking may well, however, raise more than a few eyebrows. Some further words are in order then.

A person sceptical of the legitimacy of these interests might well ask: 'Aren't philosophers to be found in their dust-crusts studies; wearing slippers and ancient woollen sweaters pondering the meaning of great theses?' Or, less ironically: 'What do they know of wild water, falling from the sky, climbing mountains and traversing ice and snow with ski or board, who pride themselves merely on clarifying the nature of thought and language and their relations to the world?' Or, perhaps the more informed and comically inclined might ask: 'Is it not the case that the only slippery slopes they know of are the ones from informal logic?' Such a set of biases is not entirely unfounded given the stereotypes of philosophy and philosophers. The aim of this volume, in some small way, is to put such preconceptions to rest. Yet there is more than mere caprice or ignorance at the heart of these preconceptions. Is there not something in the idea that rational reflection leads us away from risk and the kinds of activities called 'adventure sports?' To my mind there is. And it is to be found, at least partly, in the elision of the concepts of prudence and rationality both in everyday thinking and in philosophy. It is this relation – between 'prudence' and 'rationality' – that will be the object of these introductory remarks about the idea of a philosophical interest in adventure sports and risk. By way of introducing the present volume, I want to formulate some brief philosophical thoughts about one's commitment to the ways of life espoused here, and in so doing make manifest the kind of contribution philosophical activity can make to the theory and practice of adventure sports.

a powerful statement of the rational requirements of prudence in the living of a good life, and the ordering of a just society, is to be found in the writings of John Rawls in his magnum opus *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which is widely credited with resurrecting normative political philosophy in the West at least. And in the subsequent writings of Norman Daniels's *Am I my Parent's Keeper?* (1988) in the philosophy of healthcare and on down into the philosophy of sport itself in the shape of Miller Brown's 1990 presidential address to the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport, *Practices and Prudence*, this fruitful line of thought has been ploughed.

Rawls argues that it is definitive of our very idea of personhood that it should entail the capacity to formulate a rational plan of life. Persons are thus rational animals with the capacity to formulate a life plan. One of the great problems of modernity is that these life plans are not merely heterogeneous but conflicting. Thus the state is left, rather like a referee or umpire in a game, to mediate between the competing accounts while treating all parties in a just manner. One further and significant problem is how precisely one is to develop the rules of procedure to fairly enable ways of life that do not unfairly impinge on others. Rawls invokes a now famous thought experiment: 'the veil of ignorance'. Imagine, he says, that all rational agents must choose the rules for the governance of peoples from behind a veil that occludes all their identifying characteristics. Denied access to their situatedness, their age, culture, ethnicity, gender, spiritual beliefs, talents and so on the way come fairly and rationally to rules that can be used to order the just society. Unaware of their contingent characteristics the planner opts for prudence setting minimal rules that privilege no-one *ab initio*.

This idea is developed significantly in Daniels's 'prudential lifespan account' and introduces the metaphysical work of Derek Parfit (1984) on personhood and rationality. Daniels argues that the rational person will employ prudence in making decisions with regards to their life in time-neutral ways; avoiding the over-weighting of any given time slice. In the sports domain the 'prudential athletic lifestyle' (PAL)' (Brown, 1990: 78) demands that a rational agent will engage in sport with a concern for their well-being over an entire life, ensuring that the goods inherent in sport can be pursued and secured over the course of a lifetime. Brown argues that prudence requires an individual to be 'equally concerned about all the parts of his [sic] future' (ibid.: 78) thus keeping our options open.

Imagine, though, a biographical dimension here in order to explore the idea of this rational planning. It is not unlikely that many readers of this book, most of the contributing authors, and absolutely certainly the editor, are past their sporting prime. Our relative highpoints are behind us. For some of us, and here I speak for myself, they weren't very high but they are very much behind. So when we talk with the vibrant youth of our chosen athletic and adventurous pursuits, we might well hark back to particular first ascents, or to heavy training schedules, dreadful injuries, personal bests, peaks of skill and strategic thinking

unremittingly. We make our connections with the threads of sporting lives, past and present, and future too. By contrast, the rational planner of Brown's argument is the sportsperson who has no need for regret or self-reproach; s/he has enjoyed the goods of sport in childhood, youth, prime, middle age and maturity as a consequent of a rationally planned lifetime of prudent sporting. It's not so much prudent fiscal planning for old age, but prudent physical planning for the enjoyment of a lifetime of activity. What could be saner and more sensible? Brown's view goes to the heart of questions regarding our athletic careers and identities; it suffices the question we ought ask ourselves most generally: how ought we to plan for and engage in sports over the course of a lifetime with equal regard to the whole of that lifetime?

Brown's prudent athletic planner: a critique

To what extent are activities we engage in now both of present value and future value? Put another way: to what extent are they properly thought to be also a preparation for later ages, and in particular old age? Is it not possible to argue that certain periods of life have more significance for the evaluation of one's living a good life? Is it necessarily true that all life periods are of equal importance? Arguing to the contrary, Stole writes that:

Someone who understands the character of his own life must have some sort of view of its different periods, but must also be aware of its finitude. But this fact of finitude has important repercussions for our attitudes towards the different epochs of a single life. Older people sometimes envy the young for having so much of their lives left to live, and the young, in turn, often feel sorry for older people because they have so little time remaining. Having a substantial amount of time left is thus often thought to be of positive value, and judgments about how fortunate a given person is at a given time seem to depend not only on what is happening to him and what he is doing at that time, but on our estimation of how much time the person can reasonably count on in the future.

(Stole, 1983: 34)

A corollary of this view might be that we should consider the unity of life to be understood in the context of finitude. Might this not give us reason to value certain lifetime slices more than others without being drawn to the idea that we are necessarily irrational? Why is temporal egalitarianism thought to be obligatory for the prudent-rational planner? It is not for no reason that the utilitarians thought propinquity and certainty were criteria for moral judgements. Other things being equal we ought to prefer those acts whose satisfactions are nearer in time or more certain to be the consequences of our actions. Of course the key idea here is 'other things being equal'. And how are we fully to know the conditions of the future in our planning rationally for it? I think that these ideas can

Bernard Shaw: 'Youth is a wonderful thing. What a crime to let it on children.' If we attempt to give perspective to the follies of youth, we find that pedagogues, such as myself, tend to warn those whose life plans are unformed and uninformed of the dangers of committing all and all too hastily in this or that endeavour. Brown, then, is not alone in his general sentiment that 'chronological parochialism' (ibid.) is to be avoided.

What this entails for Brown, however, is either the foregoing of sports participation that entails unreasonable risks or – where the significant risks are inherent within the sport – the elimination of those sports entirely. In relation to Rawls's philosophical anthropology, Barber (1975) summarises what is equally applicable to Brown:

Rawlsian man in the original position is finally a striking lugubrious creature: unwilling to enter a situation that promises success because it also promises failure, unwilling to risk winning because he feels doomed to losing, ready for the worst because he cannot imagine the best, content with the security and the knowledge he will be no worse off than anyone else because he dotes to risk freedom and the possibility that he will be better off under all guises of 'rationality'.

(Barber, 1975: 299)

Beyond the timid philosophical anthropology at the heart of the veil of ignorance thought experiment, there is a further consequence of adopting a Rawlsian approach for Brown's thesis, the unpopularity of which he recognises. Athletes considering engaging in adventurous and risk-laden pursuits must either forego participation when it entails unreasonable risks or where the significant risks are inherent within the sport, they should acquiesce to the elimination of those sports entirely. Nevertheless, in demanding that we keep our options Brown assumes that our future projects are 'likely to be quite different' – but how can he know this in advance? Moreover, his position also rather begs the question as to what is going to count as a relevant time slice. And he nowhere comments on these matters. So, compare my relatively settled dispositions, attachments, and projects now, in my mid-forties, with those that will adhere in my sixties. Why are they 'likely' to be different? At what level? How much open-endedness do I need to plan for? What kind of old age shall I live to? So it seems we can prudently count the future in, without giving it equal weight. And even if we were to do so, what latitude does keeping our options open require and for how long? In short, what is the economy of prudent planning? Is Brown's prudent planner the right kind of model for personal planning?

From inception, development and decay. Economist, following a common-sense approach, note that our bio-psychological processes experience decay and deleterious effects as we age. This is the brute fact of senescence. What implications do these facts have for rational planners as risk-seekers and adventure enthusiasts? Well, at least this: that these initially increasing and later diminishing abilities themselves influence our capacity to experience enjoyment and satisfaction therein (Trostel and Taylor, 2004). Do not many of us – with heydays gone – consider ourselves beyond a peak, a notion of maturity, of life's being lived to the fullest of life's leading 'up to' ... or 'down from' a high point (Slote, 1983)? Why save so much for later periods of life the like of which we may not be able to enjoy? Now while Brown does not say it, the reader is left with the very strong impression that rationally one must regard well-being as time-neutral and that we must be prudent in our planning in order to respect this metaphysical aspect of personhood: rational persons simply must be prudent persons. He writes:

At any one time when we are young we are inclined to pursue our current projects to the fullest ability and resources. But a prudential outlook requires us to keep in mind that at later stages of our lives we may well have different projects, different allegiances, and different priorities and values, and we will then also need to call on our abilities and resources to satisfy the demands of these stages. In our prudential reflections we must be able to abstract from our present concerns and allow for later passions. We cannot, prudentially, commit all now with no thought to what prospects and projects we may then face, ones likely to be quite different from those that entice and fulfil us now and yet every bit as alluring.

(Brown, 1990: 78, emphasis added)

At this point Brown moves on from Parfit and Daniels to Rawls to find the technique that will deliver the kind of abstraction from the present and the particular that corrupts our prudence. Thus Brown invokes Rawls's veil of ignorance noted in outline above. Prudent athletic persons with no knowledge of their particularity are epistemically restricted 'to avoid age bias' (ibid.: 79). They therefore choose rationally and prudently, not knowing whether they will benefit from given future events. These three elements form Brown's Prudential Athletic Lifestyle:

A prudential viewpoint is inherently a cautious one, one that forgoes extremes with an eye to later enjoyments. In our goal to keep our options open and not to discount the importance of any stages of our lives, we expend our resources warily: Profligacy is prohibited.

(ibid.)

And profligacy, he asserts, is the problem of youth: 'The problem is most clear in the contrast between youth and age, the former inclined to risk all, the latter to

If we object, then, to the manoeuvre of the veil of ignorance for the reasons above, and of course there might be many other criticisms (such as the asocial individualism it embodies), we might allow persons to have relevant knowledge of their particularities, prospects and projects. Perhaps this will enable them to plan prudently for a lifetime of athletic activity thereby observing the principle of time-neutrality of well-being without necessarily being committed to an anthropology that is as risk-averse as Brown's prudent planner. Rawls's use of the idea of a life plan,² however, which is adopted by Brown, leads one to question the nature and scope of the rationality that underwrites the very idea of a plan of life. Indeed the idea of a life plan, though it might find a home in other social scientific thinking, seems a particularly philosophical predilection.

Larmore writes that:

The canonical view among philosophers ancient and modern has been, in essence, that the life lived well is the life lived in accord with a rational plan. To me this conception of the human good seems manifestly wrong. The idea that life should be the object of a plan is false to the human condition. It misses the important truth which Proust, by contrast, discerned and made into one of the organizing themes of his great meditation on disappointment and revelation, *A la recherche du temps perdu*: The happiness that life affords is less often the good we have reason to pursue than the good that befalls us unexpectedly.

(Larmore, 1999: 99)

The received picture is one where persons do not allow themselves so much to be at the mercy of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The distinction is nearly captured in the idea that we should lead our own lives rather than be led by them, merely allowing things to move us. The underlying distinction of course is the activity characteristic of a human agent rather than its passivity. Nussbaum (2001), locating tragedy in the ancient myths, has fruitfully explored the feature of good lives that are also beset by tragedy; a paradigm of passivity one might think. One central message in Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness* is that we cannot insure ourselves to luck. Now this in itself is not a blinding insight, a sceptic might think. But two points have to be made to understand it properly. First, it is not that we simply cannot fully see the future in order to plan rationally for it. More than this, secondly, we have to be open to the different possibilities that life may put our way. And this is precisely a corollary of the view held by many adventure enthusiasts that modern life is timid, cautious, run on socially (pre)determined and economically cautious lines.³ Imagine how this process happens in 'limit cases' such as religious conversions; or significantly adapting one's lifestyle after a heart attack; of course, a career-ending injury; or coming to terms with a new sense of a disabled self after disease or a car crash.

To this point Larmore adds two others: our conceptions of the good are limited by our experiences to date and this necessarily – to some degree or another – falls

of . . . If . . . as it . . . e fo. . . if we . . . to a . . . late . . . o, a hitherto unplanned-for good, we take away one feature of life that makes it worth living.

One root of Rawls's rationalism is that although the unreflective life is not worth living, we tend to view it from the perspective of an unbiased agent, a third person, or indeed a time-less, space-less perspective (the view from nowhere). Now Williams (1985) has offered a critique of this perspective: there is no Archimedean point from which to plan the good life. Larmore's objection is the result of the would-be viewpoint: what we reason towards. A variation of this point serves as the introduction of Richard Wollheim's book *The Thread of Life*: where do we reason from? He draws from Kierkegaard's journal for 1843 which opens:

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over that proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting-place from which to understand it backwards.

(Wollheim, 1984: 1)

Wollheim's claim is that a life is a product, but the living of a life is a process and needs to be understood processually.

By contrast, Rawls's picture, utilised by Brown, is one where we can live a prudent life by executing a life plan from nowhere in particular within the world and knowing only that we have to keep our options open. This looks rather like being able to have one's cake and eat it. But the good life is not the same as the prudent life – this much Brown acknowledges.

It strikes me that what is required here is a more anthropocentric practical reason than is on offer in Rawls's veil of ignorance and the rational deliberations of his life plan and prudent life planner which Brown expropriates. That picture of practical reason must be one which is attuned to our nature and our ethical sensibilities which includes but supercedes vegetative and animal existence. And we can find a better picture of this rational-moral drive within the anthropocentric view of Aristotle who, as Ackrill puts it:

certainly does think that the nature of man – the powers and needs all men have – determines the character that any satisfying human life must have. But since his account of the nature of man is in general terms the corresponding specification of the best life for man is also general. So while his assumption puts some limits on the possible answers to the question 'how shall I live?' it leaves considerable scope for a discussion which takes account of my individual tastes, capacities, and circumstances.

(Ackrill, 1973: 13)

at the contributors of this volume offer are rich and varied accounts of the joys and satisfactions in which inherently risky activities are pursued for a day. Adventurous risk-takers are commonly prudent about their planning; they check and double check equipment, terrain, timings and weather forecasts. Moreover, they realise that prudent planning and luck, far from incompatible with risk taking, are part and parcel of it when properly conceived. Thus adventurous sportspersons project into the future to understand the shape of their lives, both prudent and good, but certainly not in time-neutral ways. Considering the ways they do this, reflecting philosophically on the nature and goals of their pursuits and their own informed desires and identities, is the process of coming to know what kind of athletic engagement should figure in their lives. It is of course true that in many, and perhaps most, cases we are wise to avoid radical time-preference. Yet this does not entail a time-neutralising attitude to our well-being. We must acknowledge, nevertheless, that there are those for whom considered risk-taking, the *joie de vivre* to be found in the imminence of adventure, the élan of gliding on the pistes, the climbing of challenging crags, or in free bird-like falling, or reading and riding wild water, is the very essence of the good life.

Notes

- 1 But such there is. The International Association for the Philosophy of Sport was established in the United States of America in 1972 under the leadership of the celebrated Catholic philosopher, Paul Weiss under the name 'Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport'. Its journal, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, has been publishing high-quality philosophical papers ever since and has recently been joined by another journal in the field *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, which is some testament to the renewed interest in philosophical and particularly ethical aspects of sport.
- 2 It is not merely Rawls that has employed this idea. Among contemporary philosophers Charles Taylor (1985) has made important use of it, although his account of personhood is much less rationalistic. I have elsewhere given account of the possibilities of Taylor's account which is much more sympathetic to the emotions, and its significance for sporting activities in McNamee (1992). Yet the idea goes back further to the writings of Josiah Royce at the turn of the twentieth century. See Larmore (1999: 102–3).
- 3 As I come to think of it: the kind of life I lead.

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The quest for excitement and the safe society

Gunnar Breivik

Risk
Adventures

Spots

H. H. Nansen (1871)

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Introduction

In 1926, two years before he died, Fridtjof Nansen, the Norwegian Arctic explorer, scientist and humanist, gave a speech at St Andrews University in Scotland. The speech had the title 'Adventure' and Nansen talked about the human need for challenges:

It is our perpetual yearning to overcome difficulties and dangers, to see the hidden things, to penetrate into the regions outside our beaten track – it is the call of the unknown – the longing for the land of Beyond, the driving force deeply rooted in the soul of man which drove the first hunters into new regions – the mainspring perhaps of our greatest actions – of winged human thought knowing no bounds to its freedom

(Nansen, 1927: 20)

He did, however, speak not only about the deep longing for the ultimate challenges, but also about our everyday lives, 'You have to take risks, and cannot allow yourself to be frightened by them when you are convinced that you are following the right course. Nothing worth having in life is ever attained without taking risks' (ibid.: 36). Now one could think that these are the words of a very special person; a risk-taking explorer. What might ordinary citizens say on the matter?

In a national survey (Norsk Monitor, 2003) of opinions, attitudes, values and behaviour in a representative sample of the Norwegian population above 15 years, 10 per cent agreed completely and 37 per cent to some extent to the statement 'I am willing to take big chances to get what I want out of life' (ibid.: 29). That means that around half of the population is to some extent willing to take big chances in life. When one bears in mind that this includes not only the young and daring men, but the total population above 15 years, it is a strong indicator of a need for taking chances that is in total contrast to the idea of a safe society. Obviously there is a tension between, on one hand, the quest for excitement and thrills that according to Nansen is deeply rooted in human nature, and, on the other hand, the idea of a safe society that has been so central in modern welfare policies.

a realistic picture of human nature where also the thrills, excitement and risks have their place. Second, I enquire as to how this picture of 'humankind' is a realistic background for work on safety and control in all sectors of society. Finally, I show how this picture is a necessary background for the development of a thrill sector in modern society, especially related to sport, leisure, education and tourism. I will do this by drawing on knowledge from several scientific disciplines and knowledge areas.

Concepts and basic assumptions

Let us first take a look at some of the concepts that we use. We have concepts that refer to the general interest or need for thrills and excitement. Expressions like 'quest for excitement', 'thrill seeking', 'adventure seeking', 'need for stimulation' point to a general need for arousal, stimulation or novelty, and more specifically to a need for strong positive sensations or feelings, where ecstatic joy is the most extreme form. In psychological theories concepts like 'novelty seeking' are used to express this general disposition. A more specific trait, which has received a lot of attention, is called 'sensation seeking', which may be defined as 'the seeking of varied, novel, complex and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience' (Zuckerman, 1994: 27).

The quest for excitement, or more specifically sensation seeking, may involve but does not necessitate risk taking. Sometimes it seems as if risk taking in and of itself is a strong stimulation, and not only a consequence of, or an adjunct to, the seeking of strong sensations. 'Risk' is a concept that is used in several scientific and non-scientific contexts and with varying content. The concept first appeared in the Middle Ages, relating to maritime insurance (Lupton, 1999). In most cases risk seems to involve a loss of some kind (Yates and Stone, 1992). The loss may be related to economic or material factors, to social and personal factors, or to physical and mental factors (Breivik, 1999a). According to a long tradition in philosophy it is also possible to speak of existential risk that puts one's total life project in danger (Tillich, 1952).

In many theories in different scientific disciplines there is a concern for safety and control that becomes evident in the basic concepts. As Mary Douglas has repeatedly pointed out, these concepts and constructs have strong social and cultural underpinnings, and are not neutral or objective in any sense (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Douglas, 1992). Embedded in the construction and use of these concepts are several basic assumptions about what constitutes 'normal' or 'acceptable behaviour'. Humans are, for instance, often supposed to be 'risk avoiding' and 'safety seeking'. 'Risk taking' is accepted as rational only under certain circumstances. In the discussion of the risk construct Yates and Stone point to the fact that several authors have stated that 'in isolation there is no such thing as acceptable risk; because by its very nature, risk should always be rejected' (Yates and Stone, 1992: 3). Other authors, like Adams (1995), think

character. *Homo aleatorius* – dice man, gambling man – risk-taking man – also works within every one of us' (Adams, 1995: 16).

To identify the cultural and normative underpinnings, it may be a good idea to make explicit the alternative levels of risk tolerance such as risk avoidance, risk acceptance, risk taking, or risk seeking. These levels refer to varying situational and personal constraints and possibilities. In some situations we must face risks that are imposed upon us. In other situations we can choose freely which level of risk we want, as when we are skiing in the mountains. In some situations we are aware of taking risks, in others not. There are a lot of other variations around the risk taking situation. Risk taking is not a natural but a many-layered construction.

To exemplify the differences in basic assumptions let me sketch two quite different basic normative attitudes to risk that may influence not only the choice of theories and hypotheses, but also the basic concepts. One basic normative attitude could be called 'Risk Aversion'. It would imply a belief that human beings are basically risk avoiding and safety seeking. They should therefore logically avoid risks whenever it is possible. One should always try to scan, detect, identify and control risks. When it is impossible to avoid risks, then one should choose the smallest. One should always avoid taking risks that involve other persons without their explicit consent. This would exemplify a normative risk averse strategy.

An opposite basic normative attitude could be called 'Risk Acceptance'. It would imply that human beings should accept risks and even take risks under certain circumstances. One should, however, always try to identify and control risks. One should avoid or eliminate risks when there are no rewards. Risks should be minimized when other people are involved. One should, however, be willing to take risks when the rewards are obvious and the total expected outcome is positive. One should not only accept, but even seek, risks when the odds are good enough, mastery is possible and the total expected outcome is positive.

In my view we find in modern societies an increasing support of the risk aversion attitude. Risks should be eliminated or at least avoided and minimized. In this chapter I argue that there are many good reasons to give support to a more risk accepting attitude. This does not mean that we should not try to make people more rational in their dealing with risk. On the other hand we should be careful to transfer scientific ideals of risk and uncertainty to ordinary life. It may not be a good idea to make people into risk processing machines or to give an illusion of too exact information about the future. As Bernstein says about the economist Keynes, 'Rather than frightening us, Keynes' words bring great news: we are not prisoners of an inevitable future. Uncertainty makes us free' (Bernstein, 1996: 229). Uncertainty may be better than probability. 'Where everything works according to the laws of probability, we are like primitive people – or gamblers – who have no recourse but to recite incantations to their gods' (ibid.: 229). Also

because we t to: Too much certainty is boring, unrewarding a -littling' (Adams, 1995: 17). Like Keynes he thinks uncertainty makes us at we are: 'Only if there is uncertainty is there scope for responsibility and conscience. Without it we are mere predetermined automata' (ibid.: 18). This means, according to Keynes and Adams, that we are free, our decisions matter, we can change the world. In order to master the world we should not rely upon our probability calculus but upon our skills and mastery. We should confront danger and take calculated risks, but only when we have developed the necessary skills and experiential tools.

Two social cosmologies: risk versus safety

We find historical paradigms and examples of both risk acceptance and risk avoidance. Some social cosmologies favour attitudes where members of the society enter risky arenas and confront dangers by using their skills to the uttermost limit. However, we also find societies that encourage their members to control risks and base their lives on safety mechanisms, whether real or hypothetical. I think the original paradigms for these differing social cosmologies go back at least to the beginning of Western philosophy. Two thousand, five hundred years ago two Greek philosophers gave us two quite opposite views of the world, of *kosmos*. Heraclitus from Ephesus (500 BC) thought of *kosmos* as a dynamic process where everything was moving, changing. For Heraclitus the essence of *kosmos* is captured in metaphors like the streaming water in a river, the licking flames of a fire, the opposite sides of a *polemos*, a fight, the dynamic tension between the bow and string which makes the arrow fly. The world is a world of opposites, of light and dark, up and down, sweet and sour, pleasure and pain. This dynamic tension between opposites is the *dynamis*, the power of change. The deep nature of *kosmos* is that *panta rei*, everything flows or runs.

Parmenides from Elea (500 BC) thought that the *kosmos* was a huge round ball, which was in complete rest. Change and movement are illusions: 'Trust your thinking and not your senses.' Thinking tells us that the world is perfect and therefore it has to have the perfect shape of roundness and it has to be still. Parmenides' student Zeno tried in several examples to show how we end up with paradoxes when we accept that motion is possible, for instance in the famous story of Heraclides who was unable to overtake the turtle.

The thought forms of Heraclitus and Parmenides shaped our Western tradition. We find the tension between the two views in many contexts as a tension between movement and rest, process and structure, the dynamic and the static, growth and stability, risk and safety. The paradigmatic views of the two Greek philosophers are to differing degrees realized in historical societies. There is an interesting study by the climber and anthropologist Mike Thompson (1980) which shows how different environments and ways of living shape different risk strategies in two different cultures. The Hindu culture of sedentary cattle farmers

side of the Himalayas. The Hindus are safety seeking & try to spread both risks and rewards. One should help one's neighbour and one should expect help in return. The Buddhists are risk takers who concentrate both risk and rewards. It is typically the Buddhists that have raised and equipped caravans over the high mountain passes in order to trade from south to north and from north to south. (One needs to take economical, physical and social risks to do this and one may become very rich or very poor. Interestingly enough Thompson found that the Hindus were in many ways pessimistic in their outlook and the Buddhists were optimists. In many ways the Buddhists seem to represent the Heraclitan world-view. The world is a changing, uncertain place where one has to master risks in order to stay alive. One has to be alert. The Hindus seem to have more of a Parmenidean world-view, which includes the wish for stability and predictability, but with a pessimistic undertone since the world after all is unstable.

Differing social cosmologies are attached to different cultures and societies. But we can also find differing and even conflicting cosmologies running as opposing strains through one and the same society. Norway has on one hand a 'coast culture' based on fishing, shipping, trade and the oil industry. This culture in many ways expresses a risk accepting attitude. On the other hand we have an 'inland culture' based on farming and industry that express a more risk averse attitude. Church and state support and underscore risk aversion and seek to develop safety and security as fundamental values. In a survey of peoples' attitudes we actually find that the coastal people are more willing to take risks (Norisk Monitor, 2003). One reason for this is probably the long adaptation to a shifting and insecure environment that favours the open and risk accepting attitude. In his celebrated novel about the nineteenth-century fishermen who sailed to Lofoten in northern Norway for cod fishery, Johan Bojer (2005) told how these fishermen not only accepted the necessary risk. They challenged the wind and the waves, took risks and loved the competition between the boats.

We can even go further. Maybe risk and safety are complementary factors, not only in world-views, between cultures, inside a culture, between individuals (as we shall see later), but also inside individuals or persons. Moxnes (1989) has developed a psychological theory, where not only the need for safety and security is stressed, but also the need for growth, challenges and risks. Each person needs a basic safety, an ontological security, which they should get during the first years of life. On the other hand we undergo a fabulous development from conception, through birth, when growing up and until we die. It is impossible to grow and develop under full security. Therefore we need to accept chances and risks. This factor is, according to Moxnes, closely tied to our need for freedom. On the other hand our need for security is tied to our search for meaning and roots. Our life should, according to this view, make a spiral from one level of security, through risky leaps and stages of growth, to higher levels of stability. This means that there should be a place in people's individual lives as well as in societies for challenges and risks. The modern societies have tended to put too much emphasis on security. Let us look closer at why this is so and what it implies.

In many ways modern industrial society is obsessed with safety and control. We are not only obsessed with control but we have also developed a culture of fear. Frank Furedi (1997) points to the increasing risk consciousness in modern societies. People are afraid of hidden dangers everywhere. This is in sharp contrast to the fact 'that despite the many problems that face humanity, we live in a world that is far safer than at any time in history' (Furedi, 1997: 54). Furedi thinks that 'The exaggeration of problems and risks is only matched by the denigration of the problem-solving potential of people. On the basis of such a negative representation of people, it is difficult to motivate or inspire society' (ibid.: 164).

Even if the problem solving capacity of people is denigrated and undermined the solution of the problem for many still seems to lie in the direction of rational control. According to Lupron:

the emphasis in contemporary western societies on the avoidance of risk is strongly associated with the ideal of the 'civilized' body, an increasing desire to take control over one's life, to rationalize and regulate the self and the body, to avoid the vicissitudes of fate. To take unnecessary risks is commonly seen as foolhardy, careless, irresponsible, and even 'deviant', evidence of an individual's ignorance or lack of ability to regulate the self.

(Lupron, 1999: 148)

The need for control is even more salient in society at large. Modern society has become a huge industrial, technological and economic monster structure that simply must not collapse. One doesn't play with an atomic reactor. Therefore modern society can only survive if it succeeds in taming humans into rational, safety seeking creatures. Such a view of human beings emerged during the Enlightenment period in the eighteenth century. The idea of modernism encompassed progress, science, rationality and control as central factors (Harvey, 1991). The goal was to create a 'dominion of man' that could control nature and bring happiness to all human beings. The new industrial and technological society that was developed in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, presupposed the docile and tamed 'animal rationale'. Without control over impulses and needs and a rational, long-term perspective on one's own behaviour and thinking, it is impossible to run a complex, fragile technological society in a safe way. The many failures and problems in introducing modern technology and lifestyle in so-called Third World cultures are, according to many experts, due to the lack of the modernistic ethos in these cultures. They often lack the long-term planning, the achievement motivation, the control of needs and impulses, the sense of well-tempered pleasure and the concern for safety that has become endemic in the industrialized world. But this attitude, even in Western societies, is only skin deep; it is not deeply rooted in human nature. The many accidents and problems show that irrationality lurks under the surface of rationality. It seems that we

A lack of fit between modern society and human nature?

I am not in line with behaviourism and other psychological or anthropological views, according to which we humans are entirely malleable. We are not born as a 'tabula rasa', a blank tablet. Some people seem to think that it would have been nice if we had been malleable, and could be formed, developed, shaped and adapted to natural and cultural environments. For work on safety such malleability would have been nice, since we could have developed the necessary relation of fit between humankind and modern society and thereby improved safety and security.

It becomes increasingly evident, however, that human nature and modern society do not fit with each other as a hand into a glove, or as a key into a lock. There are mismatches between human nature and modern society that is evident in many sectors and particularly (for our purposes) in relation to safety. One can see the problems both from the side of the individual human being and from the side of society. The risks that are not handled well may have several causes. Some of them are outside our control. Accidents happen due to chance, bad luck, complexity, time factors and so on. Others happen because of human factors. Accidents are caused by fatigue, lack of concentration, lack of attention and foresight. Some are due to strong emotions, irrationality, bad temper, irritability, aggressiveness or stress. And at other times people simply lack the skills, do not understand things, or lack the necessary insight. As the studies of heuristics in risk taking have shown, people have many illusions concerning objective security and risk (Kahneman *et al.*, 1986). A special case is, however, the type of situations where we simply are not concerned about safety, as the only motive and want to take risks in a conscious and calculated way. Should we handle this motive as something that should be suppressed, sublimated or avoided, since it is contrary to a safety seeking attitude, or should we accept this 'beast within' as part of human nature and try to handle it in the best possible way. There are strong reasons why I think we should accept the 'beast within'. One of the reasons I think lies in our evolutionary heritage.

Evolutionary anthropology shows how humans were adapted to, and formed by, shifting environments through the last millions of years from *Homo habilis*, or earlier, to the present human being (Staski and Marks, 1992; Buss, 1988). The general picture given by these evolutionary approaches is very different from the picture of humans that in varying shapes have been presented in the last 200–300 years by the bourgeois culture in Europe. The bourgeois picture projected the human being as a frail and weak creature that had to compensate the lack of bodily strength through a well-developed brain and the use of symbolic powers like language, communication and abstract thinking. The evolutionary picture portrays humans as beings with considerable bodily strength and robustness. Humans developed as hunter-gatherers through 2 million years of evolution, from

Indians at Tule Lake, California, to the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. They have not only survived, but have led a life that the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972) has labeled, after the economist J. K. Galbraith, 'the original affluent society'.

Human beings have capabilities that make it possible to lead an elegant life in extreme conditions. Even today we witness the extreme skills and faculties of the 'human animal'. The deepest free-dive without oxygen is down to more than 120 metres below sea level. Since Habeler and Messner first took the alpine-style climbing trip to the top of Everest without oxygen, many people have done the same. I think the quest for risk, the breaking of records, the test of human limits, the exploration of wilderness, is, at least partly, explained by our past. Our evolutionary background made us more active than most animals; we need greater areas to explore, because we seem to feed, not only on food, but on novelty (Staski and Marks, 1992). Humans obviously combined exploration with willingness to take chances. They took the chance to leave the life in the trees, stepped down on the ground, and then spread out to all climate zones and geographical areas. Humankind is adapted to a life that involves challenges and risks. This fact must, through selective mechanisms, have become hard-wired into our genes. It is therefore not surprising that the first personality-related gene that was identified as part of the big human genome project was a risk taking gene (Cloninger *et al.*, 1996). This means that certain people have a genetic predisposition to take risks. Most people need challenges and are willing to take some chances. In the Norwegian study mentioned earlier (Norsk Monitor, 2003) we found that around half of the population were completely or to some extent willing to take big chances. The hard-core risk takers constitute a smaller part of the population: 4 per cent agreed completely and 10 per cent agreed to some extent to the statement 'I am interested in doing things that are dangerous or forbidden, just to experience something exciting and risky' (*ibid.*: 16). This means that 10–15 per cent are typical risk takers who do dangerous or forbidden things. They have not been socialized well enough into a Nordic welfare society and they are not the docile, safety seeking creatures that the modernist rationality has encouraged them to be. It seems that under the skin of the soft rational modern human we have a 'beast within'; one that thrives on strong stimulation and is willing to take chances to get what it wants in life. This beast is not present to the same extent in all of us. There are some variations due to age and sex. Men are willing to take bigger chances in most areas than women; the young are more risk taking than the old. But even among old people there are risk takers. Trygve Gran, the first person who crossed the North Sea in an airplane, thought it was rational to take more chances as you grow older because you have less to lose and more to win! In the Norwegian study it is not specified what kind of chances and under which circumstances people would take risks. But there seems to be a general attitude that will influence decisions and actions in more specific areas. This explains why people not only do dangerous and risky things

attitude with them when driving to the job, or trying to impress some friends on a Saturday evening. To see how a general attitude to risk spills over into various areas of life, we will look more closely at Zuckerman's theory.

Sensation seeking

We saw that Zuckerman's definition of sensation seeking included a willingness to take risks in order to get the novel and intense sensations and experiences that one wants (Zuckerman, 1994: 27). Sensation seeking can therefore contribute to a better understanding of risk taking. Zuckerman found that sensation seeking contained four relatively independent sub-factors that were weakly correlated: 'Thrill and adventure seeking' contains physical thrills like scuba diving, parachute jumping, fast skiing or diving from a high board. 'Experience seeking' relates to inner experiences, like yoga, music, drugs and to new experiences with strange people or faraway places. 'Disinhibition' refers to partying, flirting, drinking, gambling, sex. 'Boredom susceptibility' describes a restless seeking of stimulation, and avoidance of boredom of any sort. All of these factors describe attitudes and behaviours that may lead to risk taking. Most obvious is the physical type of risk taking contained in 'thrill and adventure seeking'. People who score high on all four sub-factors are the typical high sensation seekers. The scores follow a normal distribution curve which means that most of us are medium in sensation seeking needs. We like stimulation and risk to some extent, maybe more in some areas than in others. But we also feel the need for safety. Zuckerman refers to various studies that show the physiological underpinnings of sensation seeking. A study by Fulker *et al.* (1980) on the Maudsley twin register showed that 58 per cent of the general sensation seeking trait is heritable. 'The remaining 42% is due to specific or nonshared environmental influences and error of trait measurement' (Zuckerman, 1994: 291). This means that one is born with a certain disposition to seek stimulation and accept risks. This will then influence what kind of environments one seeks out and how one reacts to what one experiences. Sensation seeking children probably climb higher in the trees, feel less fear and enjoy the height more. Zuckerman and colleagues have found that high sensation seekers have strong approach behaviour. They seek out new environments, adapt better and faster to new situations. The biological mechanism behind this seems to be low levels of an enzyme (MAO) that is strongly heritable and that regulates neurotransmitters in the brain. High sensation seekers show strong approach behaviour (dopaminergic brain activity) and little inhibition (low levels of serotonergic activity). This biological disposition and the experiences from childhood and adolescence lead to certain characteristic behavioural expressions.

Zuckerman's review of the literature on sensation seeking shows that the findings are fairly consistent over a wide area of behavioural expressions. Both low sensation seekers and high sensation seekers tend to favour the more extreme variants whether it is in relation to job, leisure, sport, social relationships or

multiple situations. They prefer risk, excitement, challenges and risks. They typically become pilots, firefighters, salesmen, investors, business founders (Zuckerman, 1994: 156ff.). In the traffic, they drive faster and better, but are involved in more accidents (ibid.: 138ff.). They prefer music that is loud, complex and modern, paintings that have a crash of lines and colours (ibid.: 199ff.). They like spicy foods, drink more alcohol, are more likely to try new drugs (ibid.: 225ff.). They are involved in the more violent and risky types of crimes (ibid.: 266ff.). In sports they prefer high-risk sports, are involved in more sports and experiment with new sport forms (ibid.: 156ff.). In a series of studies Breivik (1999b) has shown that there is a close connection between the level of risk in a sport and the sensation seeking needs of the elite athletes in that sport. High-risk sports like climbing, sky diving and white-water kayaking attract high sensation seekers. The low sensation seekers prefer sports like tennis or volleyball. A medium level of sensation seeking needs was found among elite athletes in karate and ice hockey. This means that athletes tend to choose sports that match their sensation seeking needs and their willingness to take risks. Especially at elite level the match is very clear.

Zuckerman's theory, which is well documented through a lot of empirical studies (Zuckerman, 1994) shows how a general need for strong stimulation and 'quest for excitement' (Elias and Dunning, 1986) manifests itself in various specific life sectors and influences behaviour in many unexpected ways. Some people are disposed by genetic background to seek challenges and risks more than others. One could then argue like Apter (1992: 177) that, 'It is advantageous for the group if certain individuals, at any given time, are willing to place themselves at risk through exploring the various aspects of the environment – since others can learn from both their successes and failures.'

Risk and modern society: some pedagogical remarks

It seems humans now want safety, security, control and predictability in a lot of areas of life. We want technological risks to be as small as possible. Bridges, cars, atom reactors, aeroplanes, should be safe. We want other people to behave in a responsible and predictable manner in traffic and transport. At the same time people want to take risks. But risks should be taken in the right or relevant manner. We do not want to get hurt or die by uncontrollable and irrelevant risks. Risks must come in the right or relevant way. If I go climbing I want the rope to be secure, the equipment to be dependable. I know that there are risks in climbing but they must come in the right way, be relevant. And which risks are relevant? The relevant risks are those that can be predicted, controlled, mastered and dealt with by me through use of my skills. It is like the relation between truth and knowledge. My belief that it is snowing on the North Pole at a certain time may be right. But unless it is the snowing on the North Pole that causes my belief we do not say that I have knowledge. If I guess something and I am right my belief is true, but I do not have knowledge of it as such. Knowledge demands more than mere justified belief. In a similar manner my risk taking should be

What we do in nature or environments that pose different challenges to us. I think we need to develop a society where this is possible. Let me sketch a vision of society and human life where risks are included.

I think children should be given more opportunities to play outdoors, be active, explore the world, develop skills and strong bodies. We should let the children freeze a bit, get wet, starve a bit, get hurt, face problems, in order to develop resistance to stress and pain. It is not in their interest that we overprotect them. Our kindergartens and schools should give more opportunity for vigorous play. Adolescents should be given opportunities to take part in challenging sports and activities, trips into nature or new environments. For the adult population we need an arena where people can test themselves, be challenged, develop skills, get to know themselves, who they are and what they can do. They should, if possible, get a taste of real nature, of solid earth, running water and natural elements like sun, rain, desert or snow. These are the challenges and environments we are built to live in and to handle. We need to save the wilderness around us, but also the wilderness within us. We need to let *l'homme sauvage*, the wild human being, get a fair share of our life. I think it is in this way that we can remove some of the problems from the sectors where they do not belong. People should drive fast at the motor sport arena and not on the roads. They should 'get high' by sky diving instead of by using cocaine; they should fight in games like soccer, rugby or American football, instead of in the streets or in wars. People are already trying to acquire these sorts of experiences, but society is not yet ready to develop opportunities and arenas.

Some sociologists, like Ellis Cashmore, think that sports in modern society fascinate and captivate us exactly because they give us opportunities to explore deep-seated needs. Life in modern society is too predictable, too civil and too safe. Sports, and especially risk sports, present us with 'manufactured risks that are actually designed in such a way as to preserve natural dangers or build in new ones' (Cashmore, 2000: 8). And some go to extremes. In *USA Today* (Monday, 17 November 1997) Jim Pinkerton commented on John Denver's death in an plane crash:

What propelled John Denver to his death? Here was someone who spent the '60s singing folk songs, rather than fighting in the Vietnam War or even visibly protesting it. And yet a few weeks ago, the man who seemingly had dedicated his life to the mellow pleasures of country roads and Rocky Mountains highs, climbed into a motorized ultra light airplane, the Long-EZ, which had been involved in 61 crashes since 1993, taking 21 lives. He must have known the light off the California coast was potentially perilous, and yet he made that last leap. Why would former president George Bush want to jump out of an airplane, as he did last summer? Why is Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, about the death of climbers on Mount Everest, a fixture on the bestseller lists? Why have Arnold Schwarzenegger and so

... why is just about every car maker adding its own sport utility vehicle – a such upscale and traditionally sedentary marquees – and Mercedes-Benz? Why is it that seemingly every time you turn on a TV you are confronted by an endless array of 'extreme sports'? America does indeed seem overrun by iron men, triathletes, daredevils and dirtheads; legions of rock climbers, fat tire racers, ultra marathoners, bungee jumpers, and hang gliders are all climbing, racing, running, jumping, flying – and occasionally dying – in this new age of go-for-it extremism.

(Pinkerton, 1997: 11)

In their book *Quest for Excitement* (1986) Elias and Dunning have presented some reasons why we seem to have an increase in need for thrills and excitement. The civilization process runs in two directions. Control is compensated by excitement. If society gets too safety-oriented people will find arenas during their free time to get the thrills and challenges that belong to human life, as they did it with soccer and rugby in nineteenth-century England. I would add that such thrills need not be explained, as has been the case with Zuckerman, by a biological need for sensation seeking, but rather by the inherent pleasure and satisfaction that such pursuits provide. This idea is central in the flow theories of Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Deep flow is an autotelic experience, sometimes in the form of a peak experience, encountered when one masters an activity with a certain perfection, is totally involved, feels control and gets immediate feedback.

Elias and Dunning's theory may also be developed in the direction of a risk homeostasis theory. If the risks and challenges in some areas of life are reduced, there is a relevant increase in risk taking in other areas. The empirical support for such a general theory is difficult to get, because of the difficulties in assessing the relevant risk parameters. But some authors, like Apter, go to quite extreme conclusions in their willingness to develop arenas for risk: 'The safer we make life, the more people may take risks and court danger' (Apter, 1992: 191). Apter suggests that when we think we are in a certain mood or state we are actually looking for the opposite. If we are bored or secure we look for excitement and danger and vice versa. His reversal theory implies that modern society with its extreme focus on safety and control need risky arenas. He writes:

I am suggesting that we should allow people to play with fire, generate new games of violence, duel, crash cars in specially prepared runways, climb the outside of the skyscrapers, swim where there are powerful currents, and undertake other even more imaginative and dangerous activities. We should perhaps permit aggression between consenting adults. We should allow danger where only the individual who chooses the danger is at risk.

(ibid.: 194)

Risk may also increase in unexpected and non-planned ways, not only in leisure and freely chosen areas, but in the areas where most people want security

in a risk society, point to the unexpected consequences of advanced technological society (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Due to the complexities, size and dramatic consequences of failure, many industrial and technological devices and plants put people and environment at risk to a higher degree than before. Nuclear waste, chemical substances, biological warfare products, are just symptoms of possible runaway processes.

Risk in modern society, however, may also be placed at the core of human existence. Giddens thinks that modern life has a personal or existential risk. Whereas health risk has been reduced during the last 100 years, the personal risk has increased. We are more free than formerly to choose our life course, plan our life and develop it as a *Gesalt*. We are not victims of social background, class, cultural constraints, economic poverty, to the same degree as we used to be, at least not in the well-developed welfare societies. But this means also that there are no excuses if one's life becomes a failure or a misery. One of the paradoxes in present society is that as life becomes tougher and more risky, in the existential sense, we raise children, educate youth and influence adults to become softer, with less tolerance to pain, injuries, stress and problems.

Conclusion

Is the argument that we should prohibit some risk sports compelling? No, not at all. I think that, provided they enter the sports of their own free will, people should be allowed to take risks, get hurt, be injured, or even die. What about costs for society and the risks for rescue personnel? The risk takers should have opportunities to be insured, to pay premiums. The rescue personnel should be freely recruited people with no obligation to risk their lives. There are various ways to solve these problems. Nevertheless, in order to achieve a better situation, there are several things that need to be in place.

First, we need a more realistic picture of humanity and human nature. We humans are formed by evolution and possess a genetic heritage that reflects earlier life conditions. This heritage is still alive and it predisposes us not only to take chances and risks, but to react positively to the challenges they involve. Through genetic make-up and social and cultural influences there are individual and situational differences in sensation seeking and risk taking. While around half of the population like to take some chances in life, around 10 per cent are typical 'high sensation seekers'.

We should try to develop a society that is concerned about safety in all areas where we want safety and control, for instance in most situations at home, during transport and travel, at work, during research projects and so on. Since human beings are not by nature able or willing to take the necessary precautions in these areas, strong incentives with feedback loops are needed. Humans evolved in a challenging, variable and often risky environment and developed a need for challenges, a seeking of strong sensations and a willingness to take risks. Even if there is no valid inference from 'is' to 'ought', from facts directly to moral con-

ditions and risk, this is an important task for sectors such as sports, recreation, the tourist industry, educational institutions and health and rehabilitation centres. In order to master our modern, or post-modern, Heraclitian world, which is dynamic, shifting, innovative and risky, we need to educate children and adolescents through programmes and environments that are challenging for the whole person. As Giddens has pointed out, life in 'high modernity' needs persons that have the skills, the responsibility and the freedom to master the possibilities, but also the dangers that lurk. Life in the 'risk society' may become very fulfilling but also very tough, or even disastrous. That is the condition humane, the human condition, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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