

6. Transversal Reasoning on *Chessed*

Abstract

This chapter continues transversal reasoning (TR) with a conversation on *chessed* between Jonathan Sacks and the economist Samuel Bowles, and between Sacks and Bart Nooteboom on the governance of *chessed*. The reason for this TR is to explore its relevance for a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change. TR on *chessed* indicates other-regarding motives, besides self-interest, for dealing with radical uncertainty in the context of climate change. People inspired by *chessed* learn to take responsibility together, bottom-up and in the present, for a shared future. The plurality among those involved is crucial for opening up the identities people are living by in order to create a new 'we'. This new 'we' is not only between humans, but also between humans and non-humans. Joy appears as one of the results of building relationships inspired by *chessed*. TR points out that there are also negative other-regarding motivations and that seemingly positive motivations can slip into negative ones. This raises the question of whether it is possible to govern positive motivations. To answer this question, TR turns to a conversation between Sacks and Nooteboom. This conversation highlights the role of the covenant in governing positive other-regarding motivation on a micro- and macro-scale. It is argued that, in a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change, the covenant can be supported by, and help to flesh out, competition (market) and hierarchy (government).

Keywords: Transversal reasoning, Jonathan Sacks, Samuel Bowles, Bart Nooteboom, *chessed*, other, regarding motives, covenant

6.1 Introduction

This chapter continues TR that started in last chapter. The focus of this part of TR is on *chessed*, one of the critical assumptions of Sacks'

understanding of hope. In TR Sacks' *chessed* will be brought into conversation with the concept of social preference 1 derived from the work of Samuel Bowles. Thereafter, TR is developed around the governance of *chessed*. In order to develop this, we review a conversation between Sacks and Nooteboom as set forth in section 5.4, but now looking at the governance of *chessed*. Before beginning TR, we will present Bowles' social preference 1.

6.2 The economist Bowles on social preference 1

In the last two decades behavioural experiments like the Ultimatum Game, the Trust Game, the Gift Exchange Game and Public Good Games, with economists like Ernst Fehr and Urs Fischbacher, have played an important role in weakening the exclusive reliance in economics on self-interest. Today economists consider people as more socially minded than conventional economics assumed with its assumption that individuals act solely out of self-interest. Behavioural experiments have shown that ethical and other-regarding motives are common in virtually all human populations. (Bowles, 2016, p. 4) Bowles refers to ethical and other-regarding motives with the term 'social preferences'. I refer to ethical and other-regarding motives with the term 'social preference 1'. In section 7.2 I will define 'social preference 2'. Social preference 1 is a concern, positive or negative, for the well-being of others, as well as a desire to uphold ethical norms. Concrete examples of social preference 1 are altruism, reciprocity, spite, revenge, resentment, envy, and aversion to inequity (Bowles, 2016, p. 45).

For Bowles, the human ability to cooperate is one of the main reasons humans have managed to survive. He argues in his earlier work *A Cooperative Species* (2011), co-authored with Gintis, that the driving force of evolution is not primarily about competition based on self-interest, but about cooperation. Cooperation is then defined as engaging with others in a mutually beneficial activity, which includes behaviour that takes others into account. Bowles and Gintis maintain that members of groups that sustained cooperative strategies for provisioning, childrearing and sanctioning non-cooperators had significant advantages over members of non-cooperative groups. In the course of history humans have created novel environments exhibiting similar or even greater benefits of cooperation, such as the division of labour coordinated by market exchange and respect of property rights.

To be clear, classical economists never considered economic agents as merely self-interested, but they did view self-interest as an acceptable basis for good government (Bowles, 2016, p. 18). According to Bowles, the reason for this goes back to the roots of modern economics. Bowles argues that it was in the shadow of the European (religious) wars and disorder that self-interest came to be seen as an acceptable basis of good government. Religion was used as a tool of power to define groups in terms of ‘us/we’ and ‘them’. Bowles calls the form of altruism that creates ‘us/we’ and ‘them’ parochial altruism. It was in that time of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe that Adam Smith, in looking for an alternative way to serve collective benefit, formulated the idea of the market.¹ At the same time public philosophers like David Hume and Jeremy Bentham turned to the design of public policy based on what Bowles calls a ‘constitution of the knaves’, meaning that public policy should be designed on the assumption that every person is driven by pure self-interest. This is not to say that these philosophers believed that actors are only self-interested. Rather, self-interest had come to be seen as a less harmful motivation than those of religion and power. Since then, economists have come to adopt the motivation of self-interest as, what Rodrik calls, their benchmark assumption (2015, p. 187).

From the eighteenth century onwards, the market has been a powerful idea for increasing welfare based on the pursuit of self-interest. However, Bowles argues that a positive concern for the well-being of others is an essential requirement of economic and social life in today’s societies. The reason for this is that in economic exchanges contracts are often absent or incomplete, for example in the case of employment and climate change. Where markets fail there is a task for the government. However, the government can also fail in its governance, because it is absent or has a lack of information. In these cases other-regarding motives (social preference ¹) can be an additional governance mechanism, because people are intrinsically motivated to take into account the interests of those not included in the exchange (Bowles, 2016, p. 222).

1 In short, Smith argued that individual agents in maximizing their self-interest also create collective benefit. His famous example is that the baker who gets up early in the morning to bake bread is not acting out of altruism. He serves his self-interest, but by doing so, he is serving the well-being of consumers as well. What is good for the individual appears to be good for the whole. Initially, the triumph of the idea of the market was unprecedented. Competition between entrepreneurs led to (material) growth, reduction of poverty and extraordinary developments in technology. In the course of the twentieth century it became more and more visible that the market creates also negative external effects like environmental problems.

6.3 TR between Sacks and Bowles on *chessed*

This section develops TR between Sacks and Bowles on *chessed*. In 6.3.1 the question is whether and how Sacks' concept of *chessed* relates to Bowles' concept of social preference 1. Section 6.3.2 is about the relevance of this conversation between Sacks and Bowles for a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change.

6.3.1 On *chessed*

Sacks and Bowles converge in the view that human motivation goes beyond self-interest, by arguing for *chessed* (Sacks) and for social preference 1 (Bowles). *Chessed* is an expressly positive concern for the well-being of oneself and others. It is a particular type of love that seeks, bottom-up and in the present, to create relations that honour both oneself and the other. *Chessed*, therefore, includes the critical assumption of conventional economics (self-interest) and is part of Bowles' social preference 1, a concern, positive or negative, for others.

Social preference 1 makes explicitly clear that other-regarding motives are not always positive. Prosocial behaviour towards one's own group can be antisocial behaviour towards outsiders at the same time. For every 'us/we' there is a 'them'. Bowles calls this parochial altruism. Sacks recognises the resistance heard among economists when it comes to (religiously motivated) altruism which turns into parochial altruism. Sacks describes evil committed in the name of high ideals as altruistic evil (2015c, p. 9). Sacks converges with Bowles in admitting that faith in God has often contributed to conflicts between 'us/we' and 'them', for example in seventeenth-century Europe. "It is fair to say that religion did not distinguish itself at that time. It was then that honest, thoughtful men and women began to say to themselves: if people of faith cannot live together in peace, despite their differences, then for the sake of the future we must find another way" (Sacks 2011, p. 10). At the same time, Sacks contends that there is nothing specifically religious about altruistic evil, because there are also many secular utopias that have led to violence, for example Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia (Sacks, 2015c, pp. 9-10). Sacks goes on to argue that in the course of the centuries, God was further side-tracked in Western societies: first in science, then in the arts, then as the basis of good governance. God became quaint, something for the private sphere and not for the public. The reason for all of this, Sacks

maintains, is that religion failed to meet the challenge of change (Sacks, 2011, pp. 10–11).²

Sacks and Bowles also converge on the need to seek a form of reciprocity that goes beyond altruistic parochialism (Bowles) or altruistic evil (Sacks). Bowles argues that ‘... the fact that altruism and parochialism may have a common evolutionary origin, whether cultural or genetic, does not mean that the two are inseparable’ (Bowles & Gintis, 2011, p. 147). He argues that one of the main reasons humans have managed to survive is that the driving force of evolution is not primarily self-interest, but especially cooperation. He defines cooperation as engaging with others in a mutually beneficial activity, which includes other-regarding behaviour (social preference 1). Also, Sacks argues that altruism is not ‘parochial’ *per se*, by referring to the stranger. For Sacks, the key challenge in going beyond altruistic evil is to recognize the image of God in oneself and the other, especially the stranger. In his view, in monotheism God is God of all. Therefore the related concept of love, *chessed*, is not limited to one’s own group, but includes, expressly, the stranger, the one who is not like me (Sacks, 2010, p. 186; Sacks, 2011, p. 201; 2013b, p. 32; 2015c, Chapter 8).

Chessed opens up a perspective for creating relations between people with different or even conflicting identities. Identity refers to the images people live by—images of themselves, others and the world. The reason for this is that *chessed* does not seek the affirmation of one specific position, but it stimulates opposition to open up the identities people are living by. Some identities may have been useful in the past, but that does not mean that they are still useful in the present. *Chessed* orients us to creating a new and inclusive identity, a new ‘we’, beyond present identities.

For Bowles, social preference 1 includes a concern for the environment. Bowles refers, for example, to other-regarding motives when Brazilian fishermen adopt more environment-friendly traps and nets (Bowles, 2016, p. 41). *Chessed* deepens this concern. *Chessed* goes further than just a concern for the environment in the sense of people taking care of the environment. The reason for this is that *chessed* bears in itself the potential to be extended to nonhumans. Sacks connects *chessed* with the ‘I-Thou

2 In relation to the economy, the same tendency was formulated almost a century earlier by the economist Richard H. Tawney. In his view, religion had lacked “the creative energy” to reinvent its insights “in a form applicable to the needs of a more complex and mobile social order” (Tawney, 1998, p. 281). As a consequence, according to Tawney, religion took as its province the individual soul and the economy the public domain.

relationships' of Martin Buber (Sacks, 2007, p. 174). Within his poetical tract *I and Thou* (1937) Martin Buber makes the distinction between two modes of engaging the world. In the first of these modes, the mode of 'I-it', the object of experience (the It) is viewed as a thing to be utilized. In the second mode, 'I-Thou', we enter into a relationship with what or whom we encounter, and both the I and the Thou are transformed by the relation between them. For Buber, the combination I-Thou is not limited to the human sphere, but also includes our relation with nature (Buber, 1937, p. 5). In line with this is Sacks' reference to an interpretation by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch of the phrase in Genesis 1, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness' (Gen 1: 26). Hirsch says that the 'us' refers to the rest of creation (Sacks, 2016b, p. 303). *Chessed* thus challenges us to go beyond a concern for the environment by inviting us to enter into a relationship with the environment.³

Chessed also deepens Bowles' argument about the joy in working together with like-minded people (Bowles & Gintis, 2011, p. 3). Sacks adds another dimension of joy, expressed with the Hebrew *simhah*. This dimension emphasizes that considering oneself and the other as subjects, so that both can flourish and enter in a relationship in which both are transformed, creates a shared joy, especially when that flourishing is threatened. This meaning of joy has strong connotations of liberation.

To conclude, Sacks and Bowles converge in a view on human motivation which goes beyond self-interest, by arguing for *chessed* (Sacks) and for social preference 1 (Bowles). *Chessed* is an other-regarding motive that pays special attention to the stranger, the one who is not like me. Bowles points to the fact that other-regarding motives are not only positive. What is more, he shows that there is a deep historical conflict in the legacy of the research traditions of theology and economics due to parochial altruism. However, TR between Sacks and Bowles shows that conflict need not be their destiny. Sacks and Bowles converge in seeking a new 'we' (Sacks) or cooperation (Bowles) that goes beyond altruistic parochialism. *Chessed* highlights the importance of creating relations between people with different or even conflicting identities in order to open up the identities people are living by. *Chessed* deepens Bowles' concern for the environment and his understanding of joy.

3 In recent decades the question emerged whether the notion 'image of God' can be extended to nonhumans as well. An explicit plea for broadening the concept of *imago Dei* beyond human beings has been made for example by Peterson (1999). For the discussion as a whole, see also Moritz (2015).

6.3.2 On climate change

What relevance does the conversation between Sacks and Bowles on *chessed* have for a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change?

The conversation between Sacks and Bowles highlights the relevance of social preference ¹ when it comes to developing a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change. People inspired by *chessed* seek to create, in the midst of radical uncertainty, a new ‘we’ that honours both oneself and the other, especially the one still excluded, the other. Important to stress here is that *chessed* challenges us to consider the ‘other’—for example, the climate, people in areas affected by climate change, climate refugees, young people and yellow vests—not in abstract terms, but to learn to know them by name and to enter into a relationship with them.

TR orients us also to creating meaning in relations between people with different and even conflicting identities, which might be expressed in conflicting interests in the present or different opinions about the time needed for a transition related to climate change. This plurality is of crucial importance for opening up identities that may have been useful in the past, but are not useful anymore. An example here would be the director of an environmental NGO and the CEO of an oil company creating meaning by learning together how to take responsibility for a shared future. Or school children skipping school to march for the climate as an expression that they want their voices to be heard. Perhaps more uncomfortable than children raising their voices by skipping school, is the example of the often less peaceful demonstrations of the ‘yellow vest’ movement. These demonstrations started in November 2018 in France as local protests against a planned tax on fuel, part of the French President Macron’s climate plan to promote electric and hybrid vehicles. The protests quickly morphed into an angry, seemingly leaderless, nationwide protest movement demanding higher wages, a repeal of the fuel tax and even Macron’s resignation. The reason for mentioning the three examples above is to accentuate that *chessed* does not seek the affirmation of one specific position, but stimulates plurality in relationships in order to open up the identities people live by.

Chessed orients us to the role that ordinary people, ‘day-by-day experts’, play in building new relationships in the midst of radical uncertainty, in addition to ‘professional-experts’ seeking to optimize objectively a social response to climate change (section 2.4). Focusing on ordinary people—mothers, fathers, singles, children, in one word citizens—coincides with recent analyses that focus on deliberative democracy, namely on non-state

actors like citizens, cities and business (Hajer, 2011; Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014).

Chessed challenges the imagination to create not only relationships between humans, but also between humans and nonhumans. One can refer here to a concept like ‘working together with water’, as found in a report of the second Delta Committee in the Netherlands (2007-2008). The Delta committee was set up by the Dutch cabinet as a way of proactively adapting to climate change and anticipating predicted sea level rise and greater fluctuations in river discharge. The idea of the Committee is to build and develop the country as far as possible in harmony with ecological processes. (2008, p. 39) In other words, it proposes a kind of partnership between humans and nature to adapt to climate change, by working with natural processes and building with water, as the title of the reports puts it. This approach of working together with water challenges the earlier approach of managing nature. Nevertheless, one might argue that concepts like ‘working together with water’ or ‘working together with nature’ still advocate too instrumental an approach to nonhumans. The idea of extending *chessed* to nonhuman beings might be even better expressed in studies of a new field defined by Frans de Waal as evolutionary cognition. Evolutionary cognition is “... the study of all cognition (human and animal) from an evolutionary standpoint” (De Waal, 2016, p. 28). In this field the study of cognition is on a less anthropocentric footing. Evolutionary cognition tries to treat every species on its own terms, using human empathy as a way to understand other species. In this way De Waal crosses the border separating his own species from others. “True empathy is not self-focused but other-orientated. Instead of making humanity the measure of all things, we need to evaluate other species by what they are. In doing so, I am sure we will discover many magic wells, including some as yet beyond our imagination” (De Waal, 2016, p. 275).

TR shows that learning to take responsibility in the context of climate change is not necessarily a painful matter of self-sacrifice, nor feeling guilty about your ecological footprint, doing your duty or chastising conscience. It familiarizes us with a perspective which is essentially about the joy of entering into relationships with one another, especially including those yet excluded.

Thus far the good news about other-regarding motives. In TR it is especially Bowles who makes some critical remarks about it. First, he points out to the importance of not being naive about human behaviour. There are negative other-regarding motivations as well, like parochial altruism, hate, opportunism, fear, indifference or envy. Radical uncertainty in climate change can also trigger these motivations. Second, seemingly

positive motivations like *chessed*, crucial for developing an inclusive new 'we', can slip into parochial altruism, creating an 'us/we' versus a 'them'. History shows that creating a new 'we' has often led to a 'them' as well. This realistic picture of human behavior raises the question of whether it is possible to govern human behaviour that seeks to stimulate relations that honour oneself and the other without creating a 'them' in the midst of radical uncertainty. In order to answer this question, we will return to a conversation with Bart Nooteboom, who has developed insights about the governance of trust.

To conclude, the relevance of TR between Sacks and Bowles on *chessed* is that it orients us to social preference 1, besides self-interest, when it comes to developing a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change. People inspired by *chessed* seek to create a new 'we' that honours both oneself and the other in the midst of radical uncertainty. TR points especially to creating meaning in relations between people with different and even conflicting identities. The reason for this is that difference creates the opportunity to become aware of the views of oneself and the other that one lives by, to open up these views, and develop together an inclusive identity. *Chessed* challenges us to create not only relationships between humans, but also between humans and nonhumans. Joy is a result of developing relations based on *chessed*. It is Bowles who focuses attention on the importance of addressing negative other-regarding motivations. Radical uncertainty in climate change can trigger these motivations. This raises the question of whether it is possible to govern human behaviour that seeks to stimulate relations that honour oneself and the other without creating a 'them' in the midst of radical uncertainty.

6.4 Nooteboom on relational contracting

Nooteboom analyses in his book *Trust* not only the concept of trust, but also how trust can be used as an instrument of governance. Governance deals with the question of how to enable relations while reducing transaction costs, which are the costs of an economic exchange (Nooteboom, 2002, p. 103). Generally speaking, Nooteboom considers three forms of governance: (1) 'hierarchy', that can settle disputes with coercion or direct control of actions, (2) 'obligational contracts', to reduce opportunities for opportunism by legal contracts, a contract that can be enforced by a legal authority, and (3) 'relational contracting', a very wide form of governance based on relationships like kinship, advantage, mutual dependence and

shared ownership. For Nootboom, the three forms of governance can be seen as complementary instead of substitutes. “Governance on the basis of coercion of self-interest always has to be supplemented by trust, because future contingencies and motives are never completely known, and language cannot yield certainty of meaning, so that contracts and self-interest always leave a gap of uncertainty” (Nootboom, 2002, p. 200). Here the focus is on the governance of real trust, which is for Nootboom trust beyond self-interest. Nootboom considers the governance of real trust to be part of the general form of relational contracting. The reason for this is that one can select people for an economic exchange on the basis of ex ante real trust, for example kinship or friendship. If there is no ex ante real trust in an economic relation, real trust can also be developed in a process of trust building.

6.5 TR between Sacks and Nootboom on governance of *chessed*

This section develops TR between Sacks and Nootboom on governance of *chessed*. In 6.5.1 the question is whether and how Sacks’ covenant interacts with Nootboom’s relational contracting. Section 6.5.2 is about the relevance of this conversation for a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change.

6.5.1 On governance

When it comes to governance, Sacks’ understanding of hope highlights the covenant and the Sabbath. The covenant takes place at one particular moment. The Sabbath is a regular institution, and includes the renewal of the covenant. Here the focus is on the covenant; the Sabbath will be dealt with in section 7.4 and 7.5. Sacks describes the covenant as an institution that formalizes relations of *chessed*. He draws a sharp contrast between the institution of the covenant and that of the contract. He associates the covenant with an ‘other-regarding’ motivation, long-term relations and enforcement by moral commitment. He associates the contract with a motivation of self-interest, short-term transactions and legal enforcement. (2007, p. 109; Sacks, 2009b, p. 163) Let me recall briefly several characteristics of the covenant (section 4.8.2):

First, the covenant is a formalization of relations of *chessed* created by two or more people who voluntarily and each on their own terms exchange promises to take responsibility for a shared future.

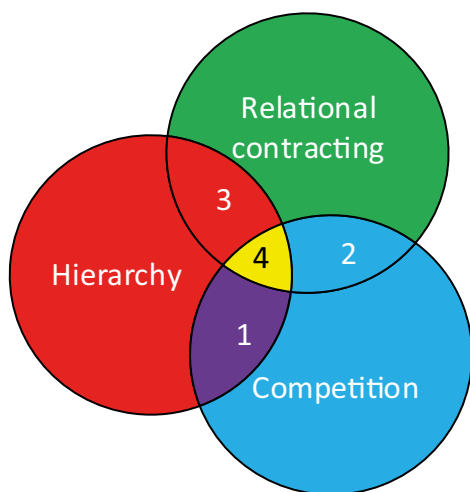
Second, entering into a covenant does not mean that everybody agrees with one another. The covenant is an argumentative association in which the dignity of difference is valued. The differences between the people are essential for opening up one's own identity in order to be able to create a new 'we'.

Third, For Sacks, the covenant has a theological dimension. The reason for this is that one of the partners of the covenant is God. God's presence is not on the surface of things. It is in relations of *chessed* that God becomes visible.

In his work, Sacks gives a nuanced definition of the covenant, but a similar treatment of the contract is hard to find. However, in economics a more nuanced definition of the contract can be found. This definition might allow for further interaction between Sacks and Nooteboom.

In economics there is a variety of contracts. When Sacks uses the term 'contract' he seems to refer to the simplest form, a legal private contract. This contract arranges a bilateral exchange between money and goods. Both parties know what they want: I sell, and you buy, that's all. For example, I buy an apple from my greengrocer. A private contract is very specific and contains legally binding obligations which can be enforced in the courts. However, it is unlikely that my greengrocer and I will go to court. The transaction is quite complete. There is not much left to have a dispute about. If he sells me a rotten apple, the next time I will simply buy my apple somewhere else. (Kay, 1993, p. 51) Nooteboom considers such an exchange part of the general form of governance called 'obligational contracts'. For him, the most characteristic element of this form of governance seems to be that it is legally binding. However, in the example of the greengrocer the key element of the exchange is not so much the fact that it is legally binding. Most of the time we might not even be aware that the transaction has a legal component. If we are disappointed in the transaction, it is easier and more common to go to the competitor next time instead of going to court. Therefore, I consider the key element of this form of governance 'competition' instead of 'obligational contracts' (Bovenberg, 2016, p. 27).

Of course, Sacks is right that the covenant is not a contract, in terms of a private contract. However, in economics Sacks' notion of covenant can be seen as part of a particular kind of governance, which Nooteboom calls 'relational contracting'. Relational contracting is about getting the interests parallel via relationships, such as kinship and friendship. Using Nooteboom, I would say that there is more interaction possible than suggested by Sacks' contrasting of the covenant and the contract. Figure 6.1 below summarises the three general forms of governance which I define in a Venn-diagram.

Figure 6.1 The three general forms of governance

In this figure, the blue circle is the general form of competition. This form is about simple social interactions in the market between a small number of people. One can refer here to the example given above about buying an apple from a greengrocer. Interactions are based on price and reputation. The red circle in the Venn-diagram is the general form of hierarchy. This form is about simple social interactions between a small and large number of people. Coercion is exercised by institutionalized authority, for example, laws and rules (government). The green circle is the form of relational contracting and contains the governance of real trust. Following Nooteboom, real trust relates especially to small-scale interactions within and between firms. However, the covenant as a formalization of *chessed* considers the whole of reality as a network of relations of trust, both small-scale and large-scale. Figure 6.1 portrays the covenant as rooted in the general form of relational contracting, because it is based on relationships of trust. At the same time, the covenant can also be prior to parts of the other two kinds of governance, when it is described as a societal covenant expressing the kind of society in which we want to live.

In the figure I distinguish several interactions between the three general forms of governance.

Overlap 1 is about interactions between government and market. An example here would be a private legal contract.

Overlap 2 is about interaction between market and relational contracting. This refers to expressions of the market which are so complex that they

are not (completely) legally contractible. Here we can think of an implicit contract like an employment contract.

Overlap 3 is about interactions between government and relational contracting. Examples of such interaction would be government stimulating the norms of civil behaviour by a message in order to prevent a weakening of support for tax-paying in society, or by messages about behaviour related to COVID-19 transmission.

Overlap 4 is about an interaction among all three forms of governance, and includes part of the covenant. An example here would be education that is founded by actors in civil society based on a certain view of the good life. The government then monitors the quality of education. Competition between schools is based on reputation (market).

A possible mix of the three forms of governance as a social response to radical uncertainty is a different outcome than generally seen in economics. In section 2.7 it was pointed out that since the financial crisis of 2007-09, several economists are not only rediscovering the theme of radical uncertainty, but are doing so from a more or less Keynesian or Hayekian perspective, respectively government or market. These perspectives are (often) regarded as two diametrically opposed forms of governance.

To conclude, in the interaction above Sacks highlights the covenant as an institution that formalizes relations motivated by *chessed*. Sacks sharply contrasts the institution of the covenant and that of the contract. However, Nooteboom deepens Sacks' understanding of the contract by arguing that there is a variety of contracts. The covenant can be seen as part of a particular kind of governance, which Nooteboom calls 'relational contracting'. The covenant can be supported by, and help to flesh out, other forms of governance.

6.5.2 On climate change

What relevance does the conversation between Sacks and Nooteboom on governance have for a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change?

The conversation familiarizes us with the covenant as a possible institution of governance to strengthen new relationships inspired by *chessed* in matters related to climate change. In section 2.7 it was stated that there is no global authority that can intervene when it comes to climate change. Therefore Biermann stresses the need for more imagination and courage in our approach to the governance of the earth system, including climate change. (2014, p. 203) One way to bring about an improved architecture of governance

is to redesign or reform and strengthen (top-down) intergovernmental decision-making (hierarchy), as Bierman proposes. Here the focus is on the covenant, which is part of the general form of relational contracting and can be described as a bottom-up agreement between subjects learning how to create space for one another and oneself. In a covenant, people formalize relations capable of creating a new world that includes all involved in the midst of radical uncertainty. TR shows that such a formalization can take place on several levels. The focus of Nooteboom is on radical uncertainty on a micro-level. However, Sacks argues that a covenant includes both the micro- and macro-level. What is more, he maintains that there is also interaction possible between the micro- and macro-level. One can think of a shared mission between a few people that develops into a movement. Another example would be children, who have to learn in particular settings, for example school, what it means to build relations that honour oneself and the other. When children grow up they are educated to widen their horizon to include the climate, fellow citizens and strangers.

Figure 6.1 shows that the covenant is not about creating either-or forms of governance. It shows that the covenant can influence the way competition (market) and hierarchy (government) are given shape. When it comes to climate change, competition is then important for stimulating innovations by entrepreneurs, and lower prices for increasing accessibility to energy sources like wind and solar. The role of the government then is not primarily about defining and controlling the outcome of the process by setting strict targets for the short and long term in a Climate Act. Due to radical uncertainty, the government does not have all the required information to set such strict targets for the short term and especially for the longer term. Rather than defining precisely the outcome and setting clearly defined targets, the role of the government should be to support the learning process of how to create a new 'we' that includes the interests of the climate and next generations.

In the covenant based on *chessed* nonhumans are not just represented by an environmental NGO. *Chessed* challenges us to imagine the possibility for including nonhumans on their own terms as well. However, we still do not have the slightest idea of what the consequences of including nonhumans in a covenant or 'a collective', as Latour puts it, will be (Latour, 2004, p. 82). Nevertheless, Latour argues that "to limit the discussion to humans, their interests, their subjectivities, and their rights, will appear as strange a few years from now as having denied the right to vote of slaves, poor people, or women" (2004, p. 69).

The covenant does not mean that all participants have to agree with one another or have the same interests in the short term. A director of

an environmental NGO and a CEO of an oil company can be part of the same covenant, even though they sharply disagree on the question of how and when to respond to climate change. What is more, it is especially the differences between people that are essential for opening up one's own identity as a way to visualize new perspectives. Therefore one can argue that the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth in the Netherlands (2013) contains elements of a covenant. The agreement gives voice to the willingness of forty-seven parties, with sometimes conflicting interests—including central, regional and local government, employers' associations and unions, nature conservation and environmental organizations, and financial institutions—to work on issues related to climate change and energy. In 2018 the Dutch government initiated new discussions with approximately 100 parties from the private sector, civil society and subnational authorities to try to reach a climate agreement in order to reduce CO₂ emissions⁴ by 49% by 2030. Something that comes closer to a proposal for a covenant can be found in Macron's letter to the French people launching *Le Grand Débat National* (January 2019) as a response to the 'yellow vest' movement:

In France, and also in Europe and the world, people are not just extremely worried, they are deeply distressed... In order for hopes to dominate fears, it is necessary and legitimate for us together to return to the major questions about our future. (2019)

In this letter Macron launched a major national debate which continued until 15 March 2019. He invited the French people to provide input for a new contract for the nation. This 'Great National Debate' resulted in plans that included the following key points: Citizens' Initiative Referendums, tax cuts for a maximum number of citizens, especially the middle-class, better control of borders at the national and European level, uncompromising approach to 'political Islam' that seeks to break with the rest of the country, reforming France's civil service and elite schools.⁵ Macron's national debate seems to come closer to a covenant than the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth in the Netherlands, because all citizens are included and not just forty-seven parties. However, some critical remarks have to

4 In this study CO₂ is used as shorthand for greenhouse gases (GHGs) that include carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and halocarbons (a group of gases including chlorofluorocarbon (CFC)).

5 See <https://granddebat.fr/>

be made. First, Macron's initiative is still a kind of contract between the government and the citizens instead of a covenant that is initiated bottom up. Second, Macron's initiative is a response to the 'yellow vest' movement and includes an uncompromising approach to, what is called, 'political Islam'. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the meaning of political Islam. Nevertheless, the critical question has to be asked whether Macron's contract can be broken open in order to become more inclusive, also to Muslim minorities in France.

Also in the Netherlands proposals have been made to develop new relations of trust in society. Pieter Omtzigt, member of Parliament for the Christian Democratic Party in the Netherlands, has argued for a new social contract between government and citizens in the Netherlands (Omtzigt, 2021, pp. 183-187). Gert-Jan Segers, the parliamentary leader of the Christian Union party, has argued explicitly for renewing the idea of covenant as found in the work of Jonathan Sacks in order to rebuild an inclusive society based on trust (Segers, 2016, pp. 220-223). These proposals have a different focus than issues related to climate change and humans-nonhumans. However they can be extended to include these issues as well.

I finish this section with an example of a covenant of hope which we drafted during the symposium 'Water in Times of Climate Change. A Values-driven Dialogue', Amsterdam, 6-7 November 2019. This symposium was closely related to the Amsterdam International Water Week 2019. The water symposium investigated issues related to water and anthropogenic climate change, focussing on several interlocking dimensions: science, economy, government and religion. An aim of the symposium was to build dialogues and long-term relationships on shared issues between environmental and climate scientists, scholars in and of religion and other fields, local and national governments and international organisations, financial corporations, business and NGOs, as well as religious and worldview communities. An outcome of the symposium was the signing of a covenant of hope, expressed as one of the Amsterdam Agreements of the Amsterdam International Water Week. The text of the covenant is as follows:

Water in Times of Climate Change: A Covenant of Hope

Water: source of life, symbol of purity. But also threatening force of nature that humans have to struggle with. Life-giving friend, life-taking foe. Since time immemorial and across the globe this ambiguous relationship with water has resonated in religious narratives and technological innovations alike. Today it resonates also in several of the Sustainable Development Goals, the umbrella to address the challenges of our times.

Securing our existence and the future of our children has become more than navigating ambiguity. Water in times of climate change has become a radical uncertainty, key to the most compelling challenges of our societies. Rising sea levels, drought and desertification, shortage of drinking water and sanitation, shapes and forms our struggles with water that will be crucial to the sustainability and viability of the earth.

We can respond in various ways to this radical uncertainty and ambiguous complexity. Reckless denial ignores all the warning signs and postpones all action so that the next generation will suffer the consequences. Helpless despair lets itself be overwhelmed by the dreadful consequences so that we lose the power and courage to act. Thoughtless self-confidence believes that our technological ingenuity will suffice so that we risk overlooking moral dimensions and yet unseen complexities.

Our response is a fearless hope that acknowledges uncertainty and complexity. Hope balances the imperfections and failings of the present with the promises and possibilities of the future. Hope builds the bridge between the “what is” of reality and the “what if” of our visions. Hope is the contrary of denial, of despair, and of the self-confidence that easily turns into a new escapism. Hope is the engaged and engaging response of the people of today to the calling from the future.

This covenant of hope invites us to respond to that calling. It brings together all those of good will, ready to share our insights, visions, resources, and capabilities. The covenant respects the dignity of our differences and the responsibility for joint action. The covenant seeks to bridge our practical, technological, legal, economical, and spiritual understandings of our predicament. Together we will take the small steps needed today to reach our rich vision of living sustainably on this earth, living with water as our dangerous friend. (Hasselaar & Ijmker, 2021, pp. 118-119)

The covenant was signed, by among others, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, ABN AMRO Bank, Van Oord Dredging and Marine Contractors, NWB Fund, Water & Waste Department Cape Town, DKI Jakarta, Waternet Amsterdam, United Nations Environmental Program, the Netherlands-Indonesia Consortium for Muslim Christian Relations, and Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). One might think that signing such a covenant is more about the intention to contribute to a new ‘we’, than about a real commitment. However, this appears not to be the case. In 2020, for example, the covenant resulted, in the weeks of the corona outbreak,

in a cooperation on developing the water strategy of the city Cape Town⁶, with a focus on including township residents in the process of becoming a water-sensitive city. Leading partners in the project are Water and Waste Department of the city of Cape Town, University of Western Cape, Waternet Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

To conclude, TR Sacks and Nooteboom on the governance of *chessed* highlights the role of the covenant in governing positive other-regarding motivation in the context of radical uncertainty related to climate change. It is argued that, in a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change, the covenant can be supported by, and flesh out, competition (market) and hierarchy (government). The concept of the covenant is compared to several recent and related initiatives. The chapter closes with an example of a covenant of hope.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have developed TR between Sacks and the economists Bowles and Nooteboom on *chessed* and related governance in order to create a fuller understanding of a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change.

TR on *chessed* between Sacks and Bowles indicates other-regarding motives, besides self-interest, for dealing with radical uncertainty in the context of climate change. People inspired by *chessed* (Sacks) learn to take responsibility together, bottom-up and in the present, for a shared future. The plurality among those involved is crucial for opening up the identities people are living by in order to create a new 'we'. Creating a new 'we' is in line with Bowles' positive other-regarding behaviour that in the course of history has created new forms of cooperation. *Chessed* challenges us to create not only a new 'we' between humans, but also between humans and nonhumans. Joy is one of the results of building relationships inspired by *chessed*, especially when one of the subjects is threatened. Nevertheless, in the conversation it is especially Bowles who makes some critical remarks, pointing out that there are also negative other-regarding motivations and that seemingly positive motivations can slip into negative ones. This raises the question of whether it is possible to govern positive motivations. To answer this question, TR turns to a conversation between Sacks and Nooteboom.

6 <https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/City%20strategies,%20plans%20and%20frameworks/Cape%20Town%20Water%20Strategy.pdf>

The conversation between Sacks and Nooteboom on the governance of *chessed* highlights the role of the covenant in governing positive other-regarding motivation on a micro- and macro-scale. It is argued that, in a social response to radical uncertainty in the context of climate change, the covenant can be supported by, and help to flesh out, competition (market) and hierarchy (government).

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