

# **THE MYTH OF THE RATIONAL MAN**

**How philosophers, political scientists,  
economists and politicians of the twentieth  
century were led astray**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

All political philosophy including economic theory, and not just our modern thinking, has been more or less deductively leaning on perceptions of what it is to be human and of human behaviour. Philosophers expect people to respond in one way or the other to the different elements of their reasoned, often idealised, systems and the governance that is implied, and the effectiveness of any such system is dependent on the possibility to predict the human responses. Earlier generations of political scientists and philosophers have, however, by necessity had, explicitly or implicitly, to base their reasoning on an intuitive understanding of the human nature and on simple models; the human brain is very complex and the ability to scientifically study it has been very limited until now. The philosopher Francis Fukuyama describes the temporality of the philosophies underlying the modern Western societies, and their dependence on a perception of human nature, in the following way:

“Contemporary liberal democracies did not emerge out of the shadowy mist of tradition...they were deliberately created by human beings *at a definite point of time, on the basis of a certain theoretical understanding of man (my italic)* and of the appropriate political institutions that should govern human society.”<sup>1</sup>

Researchers now know much more about how the brain works and how and why we humans act and behave the way we do. The research is still in early phases and the knowledge is far from complete. While some old questions have been answered and many features have been better understood, new horizons are at the same time opening up and new challenges are discovered. There is fantastic progress under way, thanks not least to the fact that there is a growing and very fruitful cooperation between scientists from all fields; psychiatrists, psychologists, physicists, neuroscientists and philosophers are learning in a constructive way from one another.

As knowledge is amassed at an impressive speed no overview of this complex area of research can be complete or final. The understanding of the progress made so far that will be presented here only relates to features that have been deemed interesting in this specific inquiry. They are based on my interpretation of the accounts that have been made accessible by scientists of the field. The paper aims not at giving definite answers but at introducing a way of thinking that should be challenged by anyone who can contribute with deeper and emerging knowledge. It is part of the naturalistic approach that the governance systems should be under constant evolution and that they from time to time should be tested against emerging well-founded scientific knowledge.

The progress should also be put into perspective. The new findings have not always added to our understanding, but rather vindicated some ways of thinking about human nature and weakened other, less substantiated, views.

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama, 1992, p 153

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE RATIONAL MAN

Something very odd happened during the twentieth century. At the same time as the research on human nature evolved and influenced media barons, marketing economists and political campaigners and the like, economic theorists and political theorists adopted a simplified model of human nature, *The Rational Man*. It is a quite striking inconsistency in the development of scientific knowledge that I believe led both the Political Right and the Political Left of the twentieth century astray

The dominating political philosophers of the late twentieth century, John Rawls and Robert Nozick, seem to have chosen not to question the accepted view of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that man can be seen as a rational being. In Rawls 'initial situation' rational men are meeting under a veil of ignorance to agree in advance on the foundation charter of their society. Rawls imagined, based on the two preconditions of truth and justice, an "initial situation that incorporates certain procedural constraints on arguments designed to lead to an original agreement on principles of justice".<sup>2</sup> Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favour his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain.<sup>3</sup> In this way Rawls builds upon and develops through logical reasoning the social contract theory as found in Locke, Rousseau and Kant. Rawls argues a principle of equal basic liberties, but in contrast to Locke he defends the rights as originating from moral capacities and self-respect.<sup>4</sup>

The libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick's understanding of man was, just as in the case of Rawls, not very directly described. He started his "Anarchy, Justice and Utopia" more closely to the liberal philosopher Locke by referring to his State of Nature and his Natural Rights.<sup>5</sup> He did not explicitly discuss the origin of the natural rights, but he referred to the Kantian second postulate that man should be treated mainly as an end in himself. He did not defend the State of Nature as a natural state; he explicitly saw it more as a thought experiment. But it seems clear that Nozick expects man to decide and act rationally; man is, as an example, and based on deductive reasoning, prepared to give up property to gain collective security and freedom from fear. Somewhat contradictory to the rational man perception Nozick is in a chapter on philanthropy arguing that man also can be convinced to part from property in a show of compassion.

The origin of the myth of the Rational Man is somewhat obscure. It is besides the scope of this investigation to try to explain why it emerged; it has to be left to historians to find the truth behind this extraordinary development. Professor Emma Rothschild<sup>6</sup> has gone back to the texts of the "fathers" of modern economic thinking, Adam Smith and Condorcet, and has

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<sup>2</sup> Rawls, 1971, p 3. Rawles has later in a debate with Amartya Sen expressed a certain regret about the fact that he based his theory on rational men.

<sup>3</sup> Rawls, 1971, p 12

<sup>4</sup> Rawls, 1958, p. 114

<sup>5</sup> Nozick, 1974, chapter I:2

<sup>6</sup> Rothschild, 2001

found that the Economic Man, as the rational man sometimes is called by economists, is a myth that has evolved over time and that Smith and Condorcet had a far more realistic view of human nature. The Founding Fathers of the US Declaration of Independence and Constitution also had a better understanding of man and a more sophisticated reasoning behind their deliberations, based on the thinking of the political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Their perceptions of a complex human nature can find its roots as far back as Socrates and Plato who saw a man driven as much by desires and a need for recognition as by reasoning.

One reason for the myth may be a perception of necessity. Tom Atkins<sup>7</sup> has offered the hypothesis that economists and other social scientists have become infatuated by the successful use of mathematics in the natural sciences. It was seen as a major task in economic and political theory to develop mathematical models that can predict the outcome of different decision situations, economic interventions and the like in a similar way that such models give predictions in natural sciences. To be able to use such models the economists needed a simplified model of man. The Rational Choice Theory offered such a man, and the use of him was eventually not lost on political scientists either. This mostly "practical" commitment to the Rational Man theory is now faltering as the latest crisis has shown the shortcomings of the models and as new mathematical tools in the form of e.g. agent-based complex models are starting to be possible to develop.

The reason why the misperceptions around human behaviour were allowed to influence decision-makers during the former century the way they did was definitely not a lack of research focusing on human nature. Already during the last century researchers started to gather evidence about how complex we human beings are and how we can be unduly influenced to take irrational decisions. This knowledge has been increasingly used when developing marketing strategies and political campaigns. Many economic and political scientists and intellectuals have also taken stock of the results of the research into human nature. The economist Herbert Simon wrote sceptically of the rational man. The Nobel Prize winner in Economy, Gary S Becker, found behaviours that cannot be explained by pure self-interest. The economists Amos Tversky's and Daniel Kahneman's research supported the psychologists' findings around biases. The Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen, in a debate with John Rawls, criticised the assumptions around man's rationality that Rawls made in his famous work on Social Justice. The writer David Brooks and, another Nobel Prize winner, Paul Krugman have in different ways tried to expose man's irrationality and inconsistency with resistance from many mainstream economic and political scientists.

While it is a question open for research why economic and political theorists alike have adopted the faulty Rational Man-theory it is somewhat easier to see why many of them may wish to cling to it.

For the Political Right of the twentieth century the perception offered support for the idea that the market economy is best left to self-regulation. The economists have been able to show that the economy will function at its best, in the interest of everyone, if man is left acting on his

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<sup>7</sup> At a conference with BEPA, European Commission, 2009.

own in line with the Rational Choice Theory. This perception is called “the trickle down” theory and claims that the fortunes made by the few will ultimately benefit all. In short - that one person’s greed automatically will put the bread on another person’s table. This belief solves a moral dilemma and it allows leading actors, such as the Chief Executive of Goldman Sachs Lloyd Blankfein<sup>8</sup>, to continue to insist that the financial wizards are “doing God’s work”. To believe that you are on the side of the good is a strong motivator, and it gives a clear incentive, especially for those involved in the financial markets, to keep the theory alive. There is thus not only the personal credibility of many economists, but also a huge political capital invested in the theory. A lot is at stake if the political economists of this dominating school are to recognize that the Rational Man is a modern myth. The uncomfortable situation became quite obvious in the running up of the recent financial crisis. The whistle-blowers were far from silent but the system governors, mostly belonging to the consensus school, refused to listen and do what would have been needed to be done in order to avert the financial meltdown. Something prevented them. The actual burning question to be answered is why so many in this group still are not in a position to address the underlying problems - problems that have to be tackled, if a repetition of the financial crisis is to be avoided. I will later discuss how this situation may be linked to the interests of the financial elite that the global market economy has created.

However, those views are more and more uncommon. There is a growing understanding among economists and political scientists that the Rational Man Theory is describing the world in an incomplete way.

The idea of the reasoning and reasonable man is also part of the heritage of the Political Left. Marx based his thinking on a rational “scientific” approach that also influenced political philosophers leaning to the Left in the Post-Socialist era. The Political Left during the twentieth century concentrated on developing the ideas of democracy, arguing the case that a more developed democracy would contribute to an equality and social justice that would be in the interest of everyone. To make his case the leading left-leaning philosopher of the twentieth century John Rawls imagined reasonable men meeting under a veil of ignorance to reach a joint result based on sound reasoning. It may be claimed that this only was a thought experiment, but underlying this experiment and the arguments made by Rawls’ followers is the idea that people when acting collectively in democratic forms can be expected to come to more rational decisions than an unregulated market would offer. An expanded democracy in this vision of the Left is just as demanding on the rationality of man as the self-regulated market is in the vision of the Right.

It is a paradox that, while many economic and political theorists have dug themselves into a hole from which some of them do not want to escape, the issues around reasoning and rationality have attracted a wide inter-disciplinary attention. The philosophers Richard Samuels, Stephen Stich and Luc Faucher have in an overview<sup>9</sup> found it helpful to mention especially three types of projects - *normative*, *descriptive* and *evaluative* projects. The *normative project* is concerned not so much with how people actually reason as with how they

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<sup>8</sup> In an interview in The Sunday Times of London as late as in November 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Samuels, Stich and Faucher, 1999

*should* reason. The goal is, following Samuels et.al, to discover rules or principles that specify standards against which the quality of human reasoning can be measured.

The *descriptive project* – which is typically pursued by psychologists, though anthropologists and computer scientists have also made important contributions – aims to characterize how people *actually* go about the business of reasoning and to discover the psychological mechanisms and processes that underlie the patterns of reasoning that are observed. The *evaluative projects*, finally, aim at determining the extent to which actual reasoning accords with the set standards.

All these aspects of rationality are important.

How to reason rationally is the subject of epistemology and is under constant debate. It is of interest to this inquiry under which conditions man can be expected to reason in accordance with set standards and therefore the standards themselves need to be discussed. Edward Stein has defined these standards in what he calls the *Standard Picture*:

“According to this picture, to be rational is to reason in accordance with principles of reasoning that are based on rules of logic, probability theory and so forth. If the standard picture of reasoning is right, principles of reasoning that are based on such rules are normative principles of reasoning, namely they are principles we ought to reason in accordance with”<sup>10</sup>

The philosopher Harold Brown<sup>11</sup> recognizes e.g. universality, necessity, rules, and algorithms as necessary elements of rationality but also notes that the way to reason rationally is far from uncontroversial, mentioning induction as one example. Stein, Brown and others concentrate on rationality as a way of reasoning, on what it is to reason correctly. This focus on normative standards is sometimes called *deontology*.<sup>12</sup> It is not an uninteresting debate for this inquiry especially as there are some proponents for what is called *moral epistemology* that claim that an innate moral “compass” offers the best available normative standard. I will not offer any attempt of resolution of the eternal debate, but one, a rejection of the idea that man is born with moral epistemic norms.

While it is of interest how one should go about the business of reasoning to reach the most correct conclusions the focus here is rather on *consequentialism*, that is on how to reason correctly in such a way that you are likely to attain certain goals or outcomes. The Rational Choice Theorists are generally seen as belonging to this school of thought. Political theorists also often seem to have this approach, which makes sense as the purpose of both democracy and market economy after all is to meet the needs of people. To quote the Rational Choice proponent Michael Allingham: “My choice is rational, or supported by reason, if it coheres with what I prefer”<sup>13</sup>. To see rationality as a means to an end has a long philosophical tradition. Aristotle<sup>14</sup> saw rationality as an instrument for achieving ends which are not themselves determined by reason. He saw choice as desire and reasoning with a view to an

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<sup>10</sup> Stein, 1996, p 4

<sup>11</sup> Brown, 1988, pp 3-37

<sup>12</sup> Samuels, Stich, Faucher, 1999, p 22

<sup>13</sup> Allingham, 1999, p 2

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, transl. 1985, p 139

end. David Hume went even further making a strong separation between means and ends claiming that “reason is and ought only to be the slave of passions”.<sup>15</sup> Deontology and consequentialism does not necessarily have to be in conflict. It can be claimed that to reason according to normative rules is the best way to reach the desired goals.

I will later discuss the values on which to base the governance of the market economy from a wider perspective than just *normative* rationality, but it should already be recognized here that a consequentialist approach will be seen to be the most appropriate.

Those that have identified shortcomings in our way of reasoning such as biases and heuristics have often been accused of a *pessimistic interpretation* of the rationality of man and evolutionary biologists such as Gerd Gigerenzer has, based on own experiments, claimed that for most practical purposes the brain reasons rationally.<sup>16</sup> In the following I will discuss some of the differences in the results of the experiments they refer to and offer the hypothesis that they have measured different types of cognition processes. In some cases the experiments have been set up in a way that triggers conscious reasoning, in some cases the conditions are such that the answers are given based on subconscious processes.

I have so far discussed two approaches to rationality, the normative and the descriptive. It is of course the third type of project identified by Samuels et.al. , the *evaluative* approach, that is a challenging next step, i.e. to determine to what extent human reasoning accords with appropriate normative standards. Or to put it more bluntly: Is the Rational Man a myth or not?

I will come back to the answer to that question at the end of this chapter.

### 3. THE PERCEPTION OF MAN IN PHILOSOPHY

The insight that human nature is complex and has many dimensions is old. How to understand human nature<sup>17</sup> has been at the heart of philosophy ever since Socrates and Plato. The philosophers have discussed issues such as the body, mind and soul and dwelled on different, often conflicting features. Man’s role in nature and to which extent his rights and values are related to an alleged Supreme Being or Deities have been other aspects that have captured the interest of generation of philosophers. It is not until the former century that the perception that there is a ‘hidden variable’, an intrinsic rationality, which is underpinning everything we do, started to spread.

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<sup>15</sup> Hume, 1740, pp 415-16

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Gigerenzer, *European Review of Social Psychology*, 2, 83-115.

<sup>17</sup> This is to a large extent an excerpt of a more extensive discussion of the understanding of man in philosophical tradition in Fukuyama, 1992

## *Desire, reason and thymos*

Socrates famously envisaged a tripartite division of the soul<sup>18</sup>. He claimed that the human soul has a *desiring part*, which is made up of many desires, the strongest of which are hunger and thirst. These desires all take a similar form of impelling man toward something outside of himself. Desires were seen as springing from the needs of food, shelter and clothing, of reproduction and of preservation of body and off-springs. In the Socratic tradition desires were perceived as “static” while philosophers that have followed Rousseau and Hegel<sup>19</sup> have been highlighting the dynamic nature of desires. They have noted that most of the desires that are generally held are related to objects that did not exist at the dawn of mankind and that desires evolve over time. Desires are generally perceived by later philosophers as drivers of progress.

But, Socrates notes, man can control his desires. There is, Socrates concludes, a second part of the soul, a *reasoning and calculating part*, which may induce man to act contrary to desire – for example when the thirsty man abstains from drinking water that he knows is contaminated. How to reason, or more precisely how to know, has become the subject of a specific discipline within philosophy named epistemology. Epistemologists have generally come to accept that man can have no absolutely held beliefs, only justified beliefs. Their interest has therefore over time been more and more focused on the epistemic norms, i.e. the rules that should be applied for accepting a belief as justified.

Socrates called the third part of his tripartite soul “*thymos*”. This is the alleged feature of man that has perhaps created the most controversy over time. In modern language it can be translated as *self-esteem* and *pride*, when using a positive language, or to *vanity* and “*amour-propre*” when highlighting the negative aspects. In Socrates’ first approach<sup>20</sup> he described thymos as the virtue held by guardians who were prepared to fight strangers in defense of their own city with great courage and anger. He later<sup>21</sup> described thymos as an innate sense of justice. A noble man becomes angrier the more unjustly he has been treated: his spirit “boils and becomes harsh”. He is prepared to suffer “in hunger, cold and everything of the sort”.<sup>22</sup> In Socrates’ view thymos can also be a pride in a city and in the common interest and in that way an essential precondition for the survival of any political community. But thymos can also, he recognizes, be a threat to a community. Just as a watchdog needs to be trained only to bite strangers, thymos has to be cultivated and tamed.

To Georg WF Hegel this third dimension of the human nature is central. He calls it *the struggle for recognition*. And he takes it very far, claiming that no man can be seen as a full man, a “master”, if he is not prepared to sacrifice his life to be recognized: “And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance...The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, 1968, trans A Bloom, 435c-441c

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, 1967, trans TM Knox, paras 190-195

<sup>20</sup> Plato, 1968, 375-376

<sup>21</sup> Plato, 1968, 439ff

<sup>22</sup> Plato, 1968, 440

recognized as a person; but he has not attained the truth of his recognition as an independent self-consciousness”<sup>23</sup>

Hegel saw, like Marx, a divided society. But while Marx saw the relations based on functions such as landlord and peasants Hegel perceived them mainly as differences in the willingness to sacrifice one’s life. Masters are prepared to die in order to be recognized, “servants” are not.

There is a Greek word for the radical form of thymos that is manifested in a wish to be recognized as *superior* to other men, namely *megalothymia*<sup>24</sup>. Machiavelli understood this form of thymos as a desire for glory and his perception gave legitimacy to the claims of aristocracy for recognition of their superiority. Aristocratic pride was attacked by most Enlightenment writers, such as David Hume and Montesquieu, and the early English liberals saw megalothymia in the form of passionate and stubborn pride of princes, or the otherworldly fanaticism of militant priests, as the chief cause of war. For the liberal movement the megalothymia of the aristocratic class was a main target. They argued that the aristocratic class in their fight for recognition destroyed rather than created wealth, that they lived on the efforts of others.

Hobbes and Locke, who are seen as founders of the Anglo-Saxon liberal movement, tried to find a governance order that suppressed thymos as a driver of man and highlighted the two other building blocks, desire and reason.<sup>25</sup> Hobbes and Locke pitted the fulfilment of the desiring part of human nature against the aspirations of thymos, hoping through social engineering to master the latter. David Epstein<sup>26</sup> has in an analysis of the Federalist Papers found that the importance of finding constructive and peaceful ways of meeting the need of man for recognition and prideful self-assertion was on the mind of several of the founding fathers. The Founding Father Madison saw popular government – the process of running for office, debating, voting – as a benign way to indulge man’s natural pride and need for self-assertion.

The American Declaration of Independence has been perceived as the final victory of Lockean philosophy when it declares “the pursuit of happiness” as the main goal of society, generally interpreted as the fulfilment of material desires, especially the right to property.

The objective of Locke-Hobbes to reduce the role of thymos in politics created several reactions. CS Lewis saw the liberal society to be composed of “*men without chests*” driven only by reason and desire, lacking the proud self-assertiveness that was somehow at the core of man’s humanity in earlier ages. It was chest that made man man, he claimed: “by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.” The most articulate critic of the liberal thinking was Friedrich Nietzsche. To him the essence of man was to value oneself, and to demand recognition of that value.<sup>27</sup> The act of evaluation is inherently in-egalitarian as it

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel, 1967, trans JB Baillie, p 233

<sup>24</sup> Fukuyama, 1992, p 182ff

<sup>25</sup> The downplaying of thymos is described in Hirschman, 1977

<sup>26</sup> Epstein, 1984

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, 1967, p. 70

decides what is better and worse, what is good and evil. He rejected the idea of *isothymia*, i.e. to be recognized the same way as others as a “slave” doctrine.

Many philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes and Jacques Rousseau, have tried to identify a *First Man*, a kind of experiment in thought to strip away those aspects of human personality that were the product of convention and to uncover those characteristics that were common to man as man. In modern language it can be seen as a search for which features are innate, genetically coded, and which are the result of education, interaction with the world, and reasoning. While Rousseau had a somewhat romantic vision of man, Hobbes had a more materialistic view of human nature. Human beings can be described and explained in purely mechanistic terms, he claimed. He understood that sensation, for example, involves a series of mechanical processes operating within the human nervous system, by means of which the sensible features of material things produce ideas in the brains of the human beings who perceive them.<sup>28</sup> Man is motivated to act in such ways as he believes likely to meet his specific desires and appetites, to relieve discomfort and to preserve and promote his own well-being.<sup>29</sup> Human volition is nothing but the determination of the will by the strongest present desire.

Hobbes’ account of the First Man emphasizes his animal nature, leaving each and every man to live in a State of Nature independently of everyone else, acting only in his own self-interest, without any regard for others. Sovereign Monarchs and Native American tribes are, Hobbes argues, living in this State of Nature.<sup>30</sup> This produces what he called the “state of war,” a way of life that is certain to prove “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>31</sup> The only escape is by entering into contracts with each other—mutually beneficial agreements to surrender all individual interests to an authoritarian regime in order to achieve the advantages of security that only such a social existence can provide.<sup>32</sup> This idea of a social contract is also to be found in the works of Rousseau and Kant.

### *A soul or a machine*

Many philosophers have placed the thinking capabilities outside the material body. Aristotle talked about a ‘form’ that was the essence of an object, linked to the object but of another character. The ‘thinking soul’ was a human ‘form’ that distinguished a living being and a corpse. Socrates and Plato went one step further and claimed that the ‘soul’ survived the death of the body. This has been the view of many religiously inspired philosophers since then, even expanding the dualism into a more general world of ‘ideas’ related to but not identical with the material world. One modern and leading proponent for a phenomenological world linked to the material being is the Australian professor of philosophy David Chalmers. He sees consciousness as a form of supervenience on the material brain<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Hobbes: “Leviathan”, I 1

<sup>29</sup> Hobbes, Leviathan, I 6

<sup>30</sup> The latter example is questionable. The tribes were socially more organized than recognized at the time.

<sup>31</sup> Hobbes, Leviathan, I 13

<sup>32</sup> Hobbes, Leviathan, I 14

<sup>33</sup> Chalmers, 1996

‘Rationalists’ such as Descartes have on the other hand declared an identity between the conscious thinking and the material being, once famously pronouncing *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). Modern realists such as George Edward Moore and existentialists such as J-P Sartre have followed in his footsteps, claiming an identity between the physical being and his ‘soul’.

### *Man as part of a divine or natural order*

Another issue in which the views have changed over time is whether we have a ‘genetic’ inheritance and if there is an inheritance that is ‘outside’ us. John Locke claimed that man is born a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, with no innate ideas. But, he argues, man is also born with moral obligations and natural rights. Those obligations and rights have a life outside him and are part of a divine order<sup>34</sup>, not necessarily an individual soul. It is clear from the Second Treatise, already quoted, that Locke did not see this understanding of man (and his State of Nature) as a purely theoretical construct and he defended himself against such possible accusations.

John Rawls claims in his Social Justice theory “that each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice”. There is a slightly religious connotation in the use of the word ‘inviolability’ and it is left somewhat unclear whether Rawls, like Locke, saw the ‘inviolability’ as part of a ‘divine’ or ‘natural’ order or as linked to human nature.

Modern researchers agree, as will be explained later, that there is an inheritance, which form us, that is not genetic, but they refer this inheritance mainly to the ecological environment, to the culture in which we are brought up. We internalize the values and the beliefs that are generally held by people surrounding us.

### *The Rediscovered Man*

The twentieth century obsession with The Rational Man has been increasingly questioned. Some such objections were mentioned already in the introduction. The philosopher and economist Richard Bronk<sup>35</sup> has in a recent book shown how traditional economic teachings miss the fact that humans are more than “rational choice machines”. They are driven by an array of sentiments and creative intuition; they seek self-esteem and pride in what they do and future pleasure in imaginatively projected future selves.

Fukuyama, who also has questioned the idea of the purely rational man, sees the work of a tamed thymos, to use the language of Socrates and Plato, in modern societies. Men do compete and they do seek recognition, but they have also accepted that the reward is in the form of fulfilment of their material desires, not in the enslaving of those that recognize them. Fukuyama agreed in the last chapter of his book called “*The Last Man*” with Aristotle that all systems are incomplete in some way and speculates whether, following Aristotle, “we might postulate that a society of last men composed entirely of desire and reason would give way to

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<sup>34</sup> In his first treatise he at the same time refutes the common idea at the time of a divinely-ordained monarchy

<sup>35</sup> Bonk, 2009, pp 2, 3, 296 ff

one of bestial first men seeking recognition alone, and vice versa, in an unending oscillation.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. A NATURALISTIC APPROACH

It is in my view obvious that a review of the dominating liberal political philosophy requires an update on the perception of human nature as a starting point. I agree with Fukuyama, who sees the chief threat to democracy to be “our own confusion of what is really at stake. For while modern societies have evolved toward democracy, modern thought has arrived at an impasse, unable to come to a consensus on what constitutes man and his specific dignity, and consequently unable to define the rights of man.”<sup>37</sup>

In this approach the aim is to base the understanding of human nature and features on contemporary scientific findings. The approach is in that sense naturalistic, which may seem as a new methodology, but, perhaps, is not all that different from the approach of the old philosophers. Their models may be perceived as entirely theoretical by an observer today, but may have been intended to be a combination of a fair and relevant representation of a physical reality and a sound theoretical reasoning. Socrates’ investigation into human nature as described by Plato was e.g. very ‘naturalistic’ as he tried to uncover human features and describe them in a relevant way. Aristotle had also a very practical approach when he reflected around the shortcomings of human nature and how to address them.

Immanuel Kant claimed that we cannot have access to the world *as-it-really-is* but only to the world *as-it-appears-to-us*. There is no perfect knowledge of the world, we are prisoners of our interpretative structures, and we are constrained by our less than perfect ability to reason and to observe through our senses. Kant argued however that we have an *a priori* understanding of time, space and causality which helps us experiencing and understanding reality. The truth seems to be that we are even more restricted than perceived by Kant as we now know that even our perception of time, space and causality is context-sensitive. But as science progresses we have not only been able to learn more about nature, we have also learned more about how we perceive, and how our senses and brain distort reality. We are getting closer and closer to understanding the world-as-it-is, even if we never will do it completely. One thing we will never be able to do is to make perfect forecasts. The ‘laws of nature’ are just approximations of a *ceteris paribus* situation that will not always occur.<sup>38</sup> When the word ‘naturalistic’ is used in this approach it should be read with this interpretation in mind. Science is bringing us closer and closer to a true understanding of the world, but will never be able to give us ‘the whole truth’.

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<sup>36</sup> Fukuyama, 1992, p. 335

<sup>37</sup> Fukuyama, 1992, p. 338

<sup>38</sup> My own favourite explanation is that there is an ‘exclusion of information’ mechanism working on all levels, from the quantum world to the world of fauna. See more about that later.

In a scientific, ‘naturalistic’ approach there is a need for a common language, a system of rules that generates ‘correct’ expressions and conveys meaning<sup>39</sup>. In languages we are used to ‘label’ objects and concepts. The labels are seldom defined in a very exact way. A label ‘chair’ can be a lot of things; an expression ‘to be in love’ leaves open a vast field of interpretations. The fact that the label can be imprecise, however, does not exclude an intended identity between the label and the object or concept.

For scientists it is the real world that matters and the labels have no life of their own. The key thing for scientists is to make testable statements. However, the relation between the ‘labels’ and the real world has been more problematic in philosophy. The debate between those that see expressions such as ‘consciousness’ as a ‘label’, an identifier of an object or concept and those that see them as phenomena with a separate identity is seldom very constructive. The reason is simple. A phenomenological belief is by definition outside the observable and can therefore not be justified by the employment of logical or other scientific methods nor it can be rejected.

Phenomenological beliefs are also often add-ons to scientific beliefs, filling in an explanatory gap left open by insufficient knowledge. When science starts to fill in this gap a real conflict can develop. This was famously the case when scientists found that the world was round and the Catholic Church saw this to be contrary to its teachings. Such conflicts still occur. Stephen Hawking<sup>40</sup> has described a meeting in modern times between theologians and scientists organized by the Vatican in which the Vatican told the scientists to stop speculating about the period before the Big Bang. The scientists were told that they were entering into a domain reserved for the Supreme Being. As will be discussed later a similar conflict is created by Christian Fundamentalists who want to regain lost territory to science by demanding that the description in the Bible of the creation, although obviously allegoric, should be regarded as science. Another example of recent conflicts is the discussion between the Australian philosopher David Chalmers, who claims that consciousness is “supervenience” on the material brain, and Professor Igor Aleksander<sup>41</sup> at Imperial College, who want to construct conscious machines. In this endeavour Aleksander, as an exploring scientist, wants to define consciousness in a quite precise testable way; it is not enough to define consciousness as a state of a being.

Phenomenological beliefs that cannot be verified or observed are not part of this inquiry; such beliefs can from the perspective of the believer add dimensions and aspects to the understanding but are not going to be presented here. Even if there is an intended ‘identity’ between a conceptual label and the real world there is neither any wish to localize or separate all neurological, chemical or other processes or objects. The intention is to describe the findings around human nature in a way that hopefully is aligned with the scientific results and at the same time is possible to understand by those outside the concerned disciplines; it of course helps if the presentation to a reasonable degree can be supported by everyone’s own introspective experiences.

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<sup>39</sup> Chomsky, 2005

<sup>40</sup> Hawking, 1988, p 128

<sup>41</sup> Aleksander, 2005, p 140ff

## 5. A MULTIDIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE

In this chapter the objective is *to extract the features in the contemporary understanding of human nature* that are deemed especially relevant for this discourse; the presumption is that those scientific findings of the last decades can be helpful when re-examining the foundation of the governance systems, even if research is uncovering new aspects more or less daily. It is neither possible nor necessary to develop a complete model of human nature; it is enough for this purpose to identify features of specific interest from a societal governance point of view. The brain and neural systems have many other functions, all essential for the human being. They are mostly left aside here; all the body functions that work also when we are deep asleep to start with. It is true that the body is an integrated whole; gastric problems can after all affect the mood, but such a desire for completeness does not serve the purpose of this inquiry, which instead is concentrating on such features that are judged to be the most relevant for a discussion of the foundations of the governance systems. The human nature is also described in very generic terms. Behind those ‘normal’ or ‘average’ features there are many variations. There are e.g. differences between men and women in how the brain works that are slowly uncovered. Scientists have just been able to explain why men often are better than women in navigating, while women find the keys that men have misplaced. The reason is that associations between different parts of the brain vary. Another variation between individuals that is genetic is the attitude to life. A gene has been found that influence some people to be more optimistic and others to be more pessimistic. The level of self-esteem can vary quite considerably too, making some more susceptible to intimidation than others. The front lobe that controls emotions is not developed in the same way in everyone, making some more prone to respond aggressively when challenged. There are many of these types of variations and it is important to realize that not everyone will act in a predicted way.

The discussion will focus on five questions that are judged to be important for the understanding of human nature from the viewpoint of political and economic science.

*First question:* Which processes are conscious and which are subconscious? How do the conscious ‘self’ and the subconscious ‘self’ interact?

*Second question:* Which features are innate and which are acquired? Is man born good or evil? Are values inherited or taught?

*Third question:* Are the three ‘drivers’ of man – desire, reason and thymos - as identified in the philosophical tradition the three features that political scientists and economists should give the greatest attention? Are there other ‘drivers’ that are as important?

*Fourth question:* How are the conscious and subconscious selves aligned? Who is in control - and of what?

*Fifth question:* How dependent are we humans of the cultural environment and the ecological inheritance?

## 6. THE CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS SELVES

The common perception is that man is in a certain way, is one coherent person. We humans are expected to have a defined set of beliefs, values and to reason in a predictable way. Contemporary research has shown that we are much more complicated than that. The way to understand us is not to see us as ‘one system’, but rather as a ‘system of systems’, systems that are built according to different principles and that are in constant and potential conflicts, conflicts which we humans continuously struggle to reconcile.

It all has to do with how the brain is built; the understanding of how it works is developing fast. The brain is built in three layers, added one after the other as evolution has progressed. Neurons are the core components of the brain, excitable cells that process and transmit information by electrochemical signalling. Eric Kandel was awarded a Nobel Prize<sup>42</sup> by studying how those neurons change in a lowly marine snail. He found that a neuron registering painful stimulation over time would connect to neurons registering experience and self-reflective sentiments. As evolution has continued, animals have developed more and more sophisticated sensors, identifying smell and taste, vision and hearing. Humans register the sensations in the primitive brain, the *brainstem*. Smell and taste are linked to this most immediate level and it is also those sensations that are generally guiding less developed animals by creating feelings and reflective actions. A lot of such direct, unconscious responses to sensations are taking place also in humans. If a finger happens to touch a hot pot we feel pain and reflectively withdraw the hand to protect ourselves. The neuroscientist Jeffrey Gray sees such reflexive actions as part of a Fight/Flight system.<sup>43</sup> When under direct threat we either fight the threat or we flee from it.

In complex vertebrates, including humans, the *amygdale*, situated between the brainstem and the most developed part of the brain, cortex, performs primary roles in the formation and storage of experiences and associates them with emotions. Sensory stimuli reach the amygdale where they form associations with memories of the stimuli. The amygdale is together with other “intermediary” parts of the brain involved in many subconscious processes. What is happening in the subconscious processes can best be described as a *valuing process*. To quote Steven Quartz: “Our brain is computing value at every fraction of a second. Everything that we look at, we form an implicit preference. Some of those make it into our

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<sup>42</sup> Westen, 2007, pp 52-53

<sup>43</sup> The theory of emotionality and personality that Jeffrey Gray developed in a series of books and articles from 1981 to 1990 has become a standard theory. For a good contemporary description see an article by Marcus and MacKuen, 2009

awareness; some of them remain at the level of our unconscious, but...what our brain is for, what our brain has evolved for, is to find what is of value in our environment.<sup>44</sup>

Gray sees two conditioned systems working on the subconscious level: He has called them the Behavioural Approach System (BAS) and the Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS). BAS is dedicated to the monitoring and assessing of previously learned behaviours. It evaluates stimuli in relation to earlier experiences and matches the expectations that have been raised with those experiences. The result of that evaluation can be positive or negative. An example: You are offered an ice-cream. As you have positive experiences of eating ice-cream you readily accept. When man faces a new or threatening situation it is instead the BIS system that responds according to Gray. The system tries to match the stimuli with similar experiences. If the match is a positive experience the system responds with positive impulses. But the system can also find that similar experiences have been negative or that there is no match with an earlier experience in which case the system responds with caution. Technically the amygdale sends impulses to other parts of the brain for increased reflexes, for facial expressions, for activation of neurotransmitters that create different emotions. As a result we *wish*, feel elated or happy about something that is about to happen or we *fear* it or feel depressed.<sup>45</sup> The emotions that the systems create can be seen as *a signalling system* that informs the conscious self about the subconscious findings.

Gray's interpretation of how those subconscious processes work is not fully tested and there are other theories that are close to his thinking but not in complete agreement. Building on Gray's theory<sup>46</sup> and other research results, Marcus and colleagues posit two systems working in parallel for subconscious appraisals. The *disposition system* generates enthusiasm/satisfaction or depression/frustration as incoming information shows a match or a mismatch with expectations. The *surveillance system* generates relaxation/calm or anxiety/unease as incoming information suggests it is either safe or potentially unsafe to continue business as usual.

A substantial experience base is built up subconsciously in every human being as valuing is something that is constantly ongoing.

The subconscious 'memories' are, however, not working in the same way as the conscious memories. The subconscious 'memories' have the form of *a running tally*; new experiences, new evaluations either strengthen or weaken the existing belief, but there is no reasoning going on subconsciously. The association between stimuli and the aversive events they predict may be mediated by *long-term potentiation*, a lingering potential for affected synapses to react more readily. Children can be trained to avoid doing things and connect the doing them with negative sentiments if parents and other adults scold the children or in other ways punish them when they have done something unjustifiable. In the same way they can be taught that

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<sup>44</sup> Steven Quartz of the California Institute of Technology at a discussion on ethics sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Westen, 2007, p 78

<sup>46</sup> I have found it quite confusing that the approach system sometimes is seen as 'an enthusiasm system' and the inhibition system as 'a fear system', whilst Gray originally saw the approach system as a response system to already evaluated stimuli and the inhibition system as a response system to novelty and threats.

something is pleasant to do by connecting the doing of it to a reward of some sort. These punishments and rewards are called *reinforcers* and they play an important role in the creation of the automatic behavioural responses.<sup>47</sup>

Some definitions may at this stage be helpful: *Affect*<sup>48</sup> is a term that is used for an entire class of phenomena: emotions, feelings and moods as well as pain, pleasure and other sensations. *Emotions* are specific sets of psychological and mental dispositions triggered by the brain in the perceived significance of a situation or object for an individual's goals (up to and including survival). Emotions are *discrete* responses to specific stimuli; *moods* are *diffuse* positive or negative states that last for a longer period of time. *Feelings* are the subjective awareness and experience of emotions. They are potential, but not necessary, consequences of emotions. A person can experience an accelerated heart rate and heightened neural processing in the amygdale but never sense the reactions or feel scared.

Many who have seen the importance of the subconscious processes are seeing a split in a rational and an emotional brain. That is, however, as these results show a too simple understanding. Emotions are not a cause; they are an effect. The emotions, the moods and the feelings they create are important signals from the subconscious to the conscious, the end-result of a subconscious evaluation process. The emotions function as *relevance detectors*.<sup>49</sup> They can stimulate attention, motivation and thought processes. Man can become alerted of external sensory data in two parallel ways, both consciously and subconsciously.<sup>50</sup> *The cerebral cortex*, which represents eighty percent of the mass of the brain, can combine the result of the information processing on the two levels; emotions creating a “communication” link between the amygdale and the reasoning cortex. Behind the eyes extending about halfway up the forehead is *the ventromedial prefrontal cortex*<sup>51</sup> that is involved in registering emotions and consciously controlling the feelings. There are two important observations to be made. The first is that the amygdale keeps a ‘running tally’ of events that is not directly controlled by or accessed by the conscious cortex. The cortex can control the feelings and thereby control many of the impulses the emotions create but not the evaluation process that created the emotions in the first place. A second important observation is that the conscious cortex can suppress feelings but not directly create them.

Toward the top and the sides of the frontal lobes the *dorsolateral prefrontal cortex* is located. This part of the brain is always active when conscious choices are made, when memories are retrieved from other parts of the cortex and in the reasoning itself. How this part of the brain works has been better understood historically, which is natural since the conscious reasoning processes are possible to study introspectively. An interesting observation is that the ability for reasoning has been added to the brain functionality rather late in the evolution process. The Australian Professor of Philosophy Kim Sterelny argues that the ability to think is an evolutionary response to threat<sup>52</sup>. Man, like other advanced mammals with a developed

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<sup>47</sup> See e.g. Marcus-MacKuen in Kuklinski (ed.), 2009

<sup>48</sup> Definitions from Brader : 2006, p. 51, inspired by Damasio

<sup>49</sup> Frijda, 1986

<sup>50</sup> Brader talks besides the conscious self of ‘nonconscious’ or ‘preconscious’ information processing.

<sup>51</sup> Westen, 2007 pp60-61

<sup>52</sup> Sterelny, 2003

cortex, has not only been forced to face physical threats of different kinds, he has also had to face epistemic challenges. Competitors and enemies lie, they hide themselves and they pretend to be something else than what they are. The advanced mammals' ability to reason is in this perspective a logical response to a hostile world.

As the subconscious 'running tally' expands through experiencing, so does the number of objects in the surrounding world that we *desire* or *fear*. Rousseau and Hegel were right in highlighting the dynamic character of our desires. Positive experiences create new desires and they are thus dependent on the environment and the exposure. But as many other philosophers they seem to have underestimated the role of fear. This negative emotion is an as important 'relevance detector' as the desiring.

The role of the subconscious processes stretches, however, further than detection and surveillance. *The subconscious makes decisions* that lead to actions, without the conscious self always being aware. The simplest form is called *primitive automaticity*<sup>53</sup>. The animal behaviourist M W Fox has illustrated<sup>54</sup> how strong the linkage between stimuli and responses that are linked to reproduction success can be. A mother turkey is conditioned to respond to a cheep-cheep sound of a baby turkey. Fox showed in his experiments that the mother turkey responded to the cheep-cheep sound even if it was given by a natural enemy. Such strong linkage between a stimulus and responses leads to *fixed-action patterns* and such patterns are usually genetically coded.

In a more developed form the subconscious decision process has been described as an *on-line processing*, as opposed to reasoned, memory-based processing<sup>55</sup>. The conscious processes are sometimes known as *explicit* and the subconscious as *implicit*.<sup>56</sup> Both types of processes are usually involved in everything we do. Conscious thought process regularly also involves subconscious processes, but there are also complete processes that are totally outside conscious attention. The researchers are starting to uncover the complexity. The subconscious self is as described learning in a different way to the conscious self. The subconscious self is not only genetically coded, it also learns by experience (including imitation), by trial and error. That is how it learns how to walk and drive a car. As relevant information is encountered, the subconscious self makes an evaluative judgment, but only keeps the running tally, simply retrieving and updating the summary evaluation with later information but forgetting the actual pieces of evidence that contributed to it. When an external stimulus is evaluated in this way in relation to the subconscious memories and values and the evaluation is leading to an automatic and fast response (and not only emotions that alert the conscious self) the process is often called a *shortcut*. Shortcuts are thus a type of networks that can be described as a simplified thinking.

Most decisions in daily life are taken subconsciously. The conclusions we reach when acting subconsciously can be different from those that we reach consciously and we are thus

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<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Cialdini, 2001 pp 234-236

<sup>54</sup> Fox, 1974

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Kuklinski (ed), 2009 p. 23, 26, 31, 129, 131-2

<sup>56</sup> Westen, 2007 p 224

inconsistent. For practical purposes I here want to introduce two concepts that aim at identifying the different ways in which we act when doing it consciously or subconsciously.

The two concepts are:

*The conscious self.* The conscious self is attentive and can choose what to give its attention to. It has a sensation of being an entity in an out-there world, which it can observe and relate to. It is an entity in time and can hold beliefs in accessible memories. It can reason, make decisions and plans for the future. It can be alerted by emotions.<sup>57</sup>

*The subconscious self.* It attends to all information received by bodily functions such as sight, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. It is also an entity in time with beliefs and access to memories in the form of running tallies. It makes most of the decisions and short-term plans. It communicates with the conscious self through emotions.

Contemporary research seems to show that we to a certain extent actually have two ‘faces’, even if they are, as will be shown in more detail, strongly interlinked and working together to guide us in our daily life. Subconscious processes are involved in most of the conscious reasoning.

It is not a new insight among psychologists that humans have several “faces” and humans have both conscious and subconscious processes that influence the way we act and feel. Freud’s theory of personality is based on the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*.<sup>58</sup> The *id* comprises uncontrolled urges, spontaneous activities and instinctive drives, most of which are unconscious. The *id*’s desires are not logically organized and the *id* may attempt to satisfy incompatible urges at the same time. The *ego*, although not strictly separated from the *id*, represents reason and common sense. It seeks to be in contact with the external world, to influence the *id* and to restrain the passions of the *id* with rationality based on socialization and education. The *ego* gets stronger as we grow up. It functions basically on the level of consciousness although some aspects are unconscious. The *superego* represents forces of morality derived from the *ego*’s efforts to master the Oedipal conflict.

Although it has been generally accepted that there are things going on subconsciously of which we are unaware, Freud’s focus on the unconscious unrestricted desires has been cast in doubt. From the 1930’s onwards it seems that GH Mead’s way of seeing the components of the self has been more influential. Mead’s sees an ‘*I*’ that is a spontaneous and active component of the self and a ‘*Me*’ that is reflexive and evaluative. While the *I* is practically involved in the world, whether as an agent or as experience, its immediate involvement with the environment makes it difficult for it to reflect on and evaluate itself at the same time. It is only when the act or experience has passed that one can look back, reflect and interpret. The *Me* is reflecting on the actions of the *I* at the earlier time. Markova cites:

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<sup>57</sup> Compare with the axioms of consciousness in Igor Aleksander, 1995 p 5:

Being conscious is to (1) be an entity in an out-there world (2) be an entity in time with a remembered past (3) give different situations and objects different attention (4) sifting choices about what to do next (5) be guided by emotions

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of Freud’s and Mead’s theories of the self see Markova, 1987, pp 95-134

“For example, while playing, a boy may tear his shirt and even continuing tearing it when his peers laugh at his appearance. The boy does it as an agent, as the I. His act is finished when the boy realizes that his mother will have to work hard to earn the money to buy him a new shirt. He now feels guilty and ashamed of his earlier performance, the I becomes the Me as he reflects on, and evaluates what he has done; in a similar way his mother will evaluate his action when she comes home from work. The boy is an object of the evaluation of others and in a similar way he becomes an object to himself. In other words the Me is *its-self*.”<sup>59</sup>

The interpretation of a conscious and subconscious self is not far from Mead’s theory of the self. The example given here shows an I acting on ‘auto-pilot’, directed by how his subconscious is ‘programmed’. The Me is a consciously reflecting component of the self, with the capability to rationally evaluate the doings of the I. I have, however, some concerns related to the Mead interpretation, which is why I have offered an alternative.

Say, for example, that an adult intervenes when the boy in the example above is tearing his shirt and asks the question how he thinks his mother would react. Such an intervention may trigger the emotion of guilt that in its turn would alert the conscious self and lead to a reconsideration of the choice of action. The conscious self will in that case become an active agent that overrides the ‘subconscious’ agent.

The Me will be more than reflective and evaluative, it will also be an actor. The conscious and subconscious selves have both cognitive and decisive roles. The difference lies in how they learn and how they reach their conclusions.

With reasoned evidence-based decision-making I will understand processes in which conscious reasoning in the end is “winning” over emotional impulses created by subconscious processes. Decisions are deemed to be unjustified when the self-justification processes have made us believe that the decisions are rational although they are not based on sound reasoning. Those latter cases are the ones that are of most concern as they are occurring quite frequently in public life. Some examples of the danger of such decision-making will later be given in the chapter around the rule of law.

A better understanding of how the subconscious processes work is important as they are dominating the daily decision-making and as the knowledge may help to comprehend and address many of the shortcomings of the liberal societal governance systems. In the following some findings on how the ‘on-line reasoning’ and ‘short-cutting’ works will be presented.

### ***Them and us***

To shortcut the subconscious self is helped by *stereotypes*. The stereotypes are energy-saving devices that allow man to make efficient decisions on the basis of past experience; help to quickly process new information and retrieve memories; make sense of real differences

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<sup>59</sup> Markova, 1987, p 103

between groups; and predict, often with considerable accuracy, how others will behave or how they will think.<sup>60</sup> Stereotypes and the information they give helps man to avoid danger, approach possible new friends, choose one school or one job over the other or to identify that person who may be the love of his life.

It matters how close a stereotype is to the self-image. Man feels stronger identity and empathy with other persons the closer his stereotype of them is to his self-image. Evolutionary traits, such as 'Inclusive Fitness', contributes to his identifying himself strongly with those with whom he shares genes.

Automatic, stereotyped behaviour is often the most efficient form of behaviour<sup>61</sup> or simply necessary<sup>62</sup>. That is, as Tavis and Aronson point out,<sup>63</sup> the upside. The downside is that the stereotypes flatten out differences within a category and exaggerate differences between them. Studies have shown that man attaches very positive sentiments to the words *us*, *we* and *ours*, while being more restrictive when it comes to *them*, *they* or *theirs*. "Boys are crybabies", a girl complained to her mother when coming home from her first day in kindergarten after seeing two boys cry. "Did no girls cry?" her mother, who happened to be a social psychologist, asked. "Oh, yes," her daughter said. "But only *some* girls cry. I didn't cry."<sup>64</sup>

A negative side of stereotypes is thus that they create *prejudices*. Such prejudices can be possible to diminish: when the economic competition subsides, when a truce is signed, when the profession is integrated, when *they* become more familiar, when '*we*' are in a position to realize that they aren't so different from '*us*'. *Exposure* can affect the subconscious beliefs and thus also the stereotypes. If you are white and get to know a black man and start to realize how much alike you are, your stereotype of black men will be affected. People who regularly meet people from other nations, other religions or who are ethnically different are less likely to have prejudices than those that are living only among people who are like themselves.

But the prejudices are very difficult to eradicate for the simple reason that the stereotypes are needed to make quick decisions. In fact, there are limits to how broadly we can develop trust with other people. Fukuyama has found that societies with strong family-centric values, while having deep bonds of trust within families, tend to have narrower radii of trust outside families.<sup>65</sup> This limits the economic networks. As examples Fukuyama cites the large proportion of small-scale, family-owned businesses in China, Korea and Italy and the low number of global enterprises relative the size of their economies in comparison with e.g. Holland with another culture. Karla Hoff of the World Bank and Arijt Sen of the Indian Statistical Institute believes that overly strong family ties can have a negative impact on development, as extended definitions of family create incentives for free riding and low returns to work and savings.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Macrae, Milne and Bodenhausen, 1994, pp 37-47

<sup>61</sup> Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996, p 650-669

<sup>62</sup> Bodenhausen, Macrae & Sherman, 1999, pp 271-290

<sup>63</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, pp 57-67

<sup>64</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, p

<sup>65</sup> Fukuyama, 1995, pp 62-145 quoted by Beinhocker, 2006 p 434.

<sup>66</sup> Hoff and Sen, 2001, quoted by Beinhocker, 2006 p 434

There are some well-known cases (such as Al Campanis, Mel Gibson) when a famous person has slipped into prejudicial comments under the influence of the situation or alcohol. Many claim the circumstances exposed their true views and that there are no excuses. Mel Gibson's stereotype of a Jew was most likely influenced by his father who was a well-known anti-Semite and denier of Holocaust. For Al Campanis the incident led to public disgrace and a personal tragedy. Contemporary research shows that people perhaps should not have been so quick to criticize. The brain works in quite a complicated way. Most, or more correctly all, have stereotypes in the subconscious, many of which the conscious self may find prejudicial if aware of them. An individual may have stored rejections of those prejudices in the memory, but as they are based on reasoning they are accessible only to the conscious selves. If someone is drunk or under stress conscious beliefs may not be accessible as drugs and fear can more or less close down the reasoning conscious self. Left only with subconscious stereotypes anyone may act in a way he would not do under normal circumstances.

The fact that the subconscious can hold prejudicial views unknown to the conscious self has been politically utilized. Westen has shown how political candidates have in a subtle way exploited racial prejudice in their campaigning. By using words that do not stir the conscious selves but alert the subconscious they have been able to create feelings of unease with the alternative candidate<sup>67</sup>. The remedy to such practices is according to Westen to uncover them, to make the underlying message visible.<sup>68</sup> The logic behind his advice is simple: Much fewer conscious than subconscious beliefs are prejudicial beliefs.

Cognitive dissonances are not always solved; the self justification process, which will be discussed in a moment, may just manage to explain them away. In some cases, as when it comes to stereotypes, they are kept, partly because the stereotypes are needed. When the dissonance occasionally is brought into the open it will be up to the conscious self to override the emotions the subconscious has created.

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah Palin is a master of this genre

<sup>68</sup> Westen, 2007, p 223

## Network of associations

One important feature of the brain is the *networks of association*. There are millions and millions of such neural networks, all unconscious if not activated. They can be structured in many different ways. If you think about a dog you have activated a network that contains words such as terrier and beagle and feelings such as loving or dangerous, depending on your personal experience. Associations can also be made to similar words or more distantly to events in which a dog has had a role. Such networks of association can become latent and more easily accessible by the activation that the word dog created. An external stimulus can activate both networks of which man can become conscious and networks of which he is unaware. Both types can be “locked” with emotions, sometimes conflicting emotions.<sup>69</sup> Networks of association play an important role in *creativity* and *imagination*; an artist may e.g. get different associations than an engineer when faced with a new situation because their ways of associating are different. The artist’s main association when seeing a new car model may be to other objects with similar colours or forms, while the engineer may associate the new car with the engines and capacities.

## Reciprocation

Evolutionary biologists see reciprocal altruism, the tendency to help one another out to mutual benefit, as one of the three main drivers of human evolution. Sociologists talk about the rule for reciprocation which requires that one person try to repay, in kind, what another person is providing. An individual may give something to another with confidence that it will not be lost as the rule of reciprocation demand him to repay in the future. “The sense of future obligation within the rule makes possible the development of various kinds of continuing relationships, transactions, and exchanges that are beneficial to the society. Consequently, all members of the society are trained from childhood to abide by the rule or suffer serious social disapproval”<sup>70</sup>

Cialdini seems in this quote to see the rule of reciprocation as part of an ecological inheritance, not a genetic. Reciprocity is according to him something man is trained to do in the interest of society as a whole.

Beinhocker addresses this debate: "...there are three pieces of evidence that point strongly to a genetic basis. First is the fact that strong reciprocity shows up in widely varying cultures – no society has been found that does not exhibit some form of it, thus indicating that its origins are not purely cultural. Second is the fact that similar behaviors have been observed in a number of primate species. And third, a biochemical basis for the behaviors has been discovered in oxytocin, a brain hormone that plays a critical role in generating feelings of trust and eliciting cooperation in humans”<sup>71</sup>

While seeing benefits Cialdini also sees dangers with the rule. It is a rule that can be used to gain compliance by making the target person feel obliged to reciprocate in kind to an offer or

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<sup>69</sup> Westen, 1999, p 83

<sup>70</sup> Cialdini, 2001, p 50

<sup>71</sup> Beinhocker, 2006, p 419. Beinhocker refers in the last claim to Darmasio, 2005 p 571-572.

initial concession. Cialdini gives a lot of examples on how we have been proven to respond “without thinking” to such “gifts”.

The rule of reciprocation is an example of a shortcut, where the subconscious self is so strongly conditioned that it acts without alerting the conscious self. As the rule in itself is generally beneficial from a societal point of view, Cialdini claims that the best defence against abuses is not systematic rejection as that would be to go against the conditioned response. The response should instead be to reject to reciprocate, if it is clear that one is tricked, even if he admits that such a stand can lead to cognitive dissonance followed by distress.

### *Consistency*

Consistency is highly valued in society. If the individual is consistent in her words, beliefs, attitudes and deeds it makes her interaction with other people easier. It is also an almost necessary feature of the shortcuts; the aim of many shortcuts is to help to navigate quickly in new situations by applying already made decisions in similar cases in a consistent way.<sup>72</sup> It seems thus that this aspect of consistency must be part of the genetic heritage as shortcuts by nature are aiming at repetitive and similar responses.

If someone has made a commitment she has a tendency to make a second. It is the need to be consistent that is pushing her. That is one of the drivers behind partisanship. It is also a feature used by salesmen to make her to commit to more and more.

An individual can find himself in distress if he “without thinking” has responded in a consistent way to a series of requests made to him. Suddenly he has committed to something he really does not want to do. The step-by-step justification that will be discussed later is an example of such a situation. To backtrack and admit that he really does not want to buy all these “extras” or agree to all these “actions” is hard as it threatens his thymos. Man wants to be seen as consistent in all he does. Shortcuts that help to act quickly in situations similar to the ones an individual has been experiencing before can be very helpful, but they can also put the conscious self in trouble.

### *Group conformity, Social proof and Liking*

Imitation is one way in which man learns, especially during his first years. The ecological inheritance is often a result of imitation. But the influence of people around the individual does not stop there. When he is uncertain he looks at what others do.

Cialdini has gathered a number of examples of how we can be unduly influenced. In the 1950's a social psychologist Solomon Asch tried to understand why Germans went along with the Nazis. He made an experiment in which people were asked to compare the length of one line with three other lines and tell which one that was closest in length. The task was extremely simple and the six answered quickly and correctly several times all of them. But then something happened. Five of them gave suddenly a wrong answer (which they were told to do as part of the experiment). When faced with this dissonance the sixth person answered

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<sup>72</sup> Cialdini, 2001, pp 95-97

wrongly one third of the times, although he did not know any of the other participants or was likely to meet them again. In a similar experiment performed by another researcher people were asked to consider this statement: “Free speech being a privilege rather than a right, it is proper for a society to suspend free speech when it feels threatened”. Asked the question individually only 19 % of a control group agreed, but being confronted with a yes from four other participants 58 % agreed. Group conformity is a strong motivator.<sup>73</sup>

Sales people know that group dynamics works even better if the “group” consists of people who are like the targeted object for the sales and thus uses references to friends or other of the object’s “stereotype” as social proofs to influence him. Likewise - when people around do not react nor do we. Group dynamics seem to soften personal responsibility. Studies show that a victim to an accident or crime is far more likely to be helped by a single bystander than if passed by hundreds of people<sup>74</sup>.

People prefer to say yes to individuals they like. Psychologists have identified a number of factors that are important: Physical attractiveness, similarity, praise, familiarity, and association.<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that three of those, similarity, familiarity and association, respond to man’s stereotyping. The more we can identify ourselves with the individual in question the more likely we are to have a positive opinion of him or her. That man responds to praise is natural as it confirms that he is recognized. That he responds to physical attractiveness is likewise not very surprising and most probably linked to Reproductive success.

### *Authority*

Obedience to authority is an important feature of human social organization. It allows the development of sophisticated structures for production of resources, for trade and social control that would not have otherwise been possible. Religions are regularly enforcing obedience to authority; the Bible demands absolute submission to the wishes of God.<sup>76</sup> When Lieutenant William Calley ordered his soldiers to kill the inhabitants of My Lai in Vietnam - infants and toddlers as well as their parents and grandparents – the soldiers obeyed. A national survey has shown that 51 % of Americans would have done the same if ordered to.<sup>77</sup>

The willingness to comply with authorized command is not a specific American feature. Research done in other countries such as Holland, Germany, Spain, Italy, Australia and Jordan has shown a similar compliance with authority.<sup>78</sup>

Authority is acquired in several different ways. *Titles* are one way. In one experiment conducted on five classes of Australian college students a man from Cambridge University was introduced in different ways; in one class he was presented as a student, in a second as a demonstrator, in a third as a lecturer, in the fourth as a senior lecturer and in a fifth as a

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<sup>73</sup> Thaler-Sunstein, 2008, pp 55-65

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. Latané & Darley, 1968

<sup>75</sup> Cialdini, 2001, p 176

<sup>76</sup> Cialdini, 2001, p 185

<sup>77</sup> Kelman & Hamilton, 1989

<sup>78</sup> Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1986, pp 311-324.

professor. After he left the room the students were asked to estimate his height. His height increased in average with half an inch with each increase in status so that the “professor” was perceived to be 2 ½ inches taller than the “student”.<sup>79</sup> *Clothes* also establish authority. Experiments show that an individual is much more likely to comply with a request if the person asking is in uniform than in ordinary clothes. The same is true, even if not in the same degree, if the person is dressed in business attire. Also *trappings* such as expensive jewelry and cars have effect. An experiment showed that motorists would wait significantly longer before honking their horns at a new, luxury car stopped in front of a green traffic light than an older, economy model.<sup>80</sup> 50 % never touched their horn until the luxury car went on.

The deference to authority is probably part of the ecological inheritance and functions as a kind of decision-making shortcut. Individuals comply with authority because they are conditioned to believe it to be the correct conduct and because authorities are presumed to have knowledge and power.<sup>81</sup>

### *Psychological reactance*

Something is desired more if it is censored or perceived as scarce or if it has been acquired but been taken away. The effect is called *psychological reactance* and it works also on group level. Information is perceived as more valuable if it is “exclusive” or threatened by censorship. The desire can also be aroused, if there are others competing for the same scarce resource.

### *Anchoring, priming, similarity and availability*

If an individual has just learned the size of Chicago and is then to guess the size of Milwaukee, she will give a much higher estimate than if she just has been told the size of the smaller town Green Bay. This effect is called *anchoring*. Social scientists have found that they can *prime* people into a certain behavior by offering them such seemingly irrelevant clues.

Another type of bias can be created by *availability*. People who have just experienced an earthquake, a hurricane or 9/11 are more likely to overestimate future risks than those that have not recently had such experiences.

A third bias is *similarity heuristics*. The subconscious shortcuts are expecting that things are going to repeat themselves. If a coin is tossed three times and heads are coming up every time

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<sup>79</sup> Wilson, 1968, pp 97-102

<sup>80</sup> Doob & Gross, 1968 pp 213-218

<sup>81</sup> Cialdini, 2001, pp 200-201

the subconscious self based on similarity heuristics is going to tell the conscious self to expect another head the fourth time.<sup>82</sup>

## 7. WHICH FEATURES ARE INNATE?

It is an important question whether features are *inherited* or whether and to what degree they are *acquired*. It is an area in which researchers so far have been unable to give clear answers.

The genetic codes that are carried by the DNA have until recently been seen as more or less given through the merger of a sperm and an egg. This perception is now under scrutiny. It has for a long time been recognized that the DNA can be affected by e.g. radioactive radiation, but researchers have now shown that the DNA is less stable than they have believed and that less dramatic mutations can take place during the pregnancy.

There are also many ways in which we can acquire a feature. In the earliest part of our lives we learn by imitation. We learn through experiencing, through trial and error. We internalize, in our subconscious, values and memories through parental guiding with its encouragements and discouragements and we develop our behavioural information and response systems. As we grow up we learn how to read and how to reason in order to develop our knowledge. We are also allegedly born with an ability to invent. Creativity is shown to be a complex interaction between a reflecting mind and environmental conditions<sup>83</sup>.

There are many possible conclusions to the question whether a feature is innate:

- A feature can be genetically coded and therefore in principle unable to change without physical interference. Examples are the colour of our eyes or the length of our legs.
- A feature can be perceived to be part of a genetic inheritance, but it may instead be part of an almost indistinguishable ecological inheritance. Genetic inheritance is part of an evolved, adapted system, the biological function of which is to generate similarities between parents and off-springs. Ecological inheritance on the other hand is not involving links between different individuals but can be seen as a downstream cumulative construction process in which behaviours are part of a collective learning process. Many group behaviours are most likely of the latter type.<sup>84</sup>
- A feature can be ‘pre-programmed’ but possible to expand. An example is desire. Desiring is a primitive inherited feature and is strongly linked to the evolutionary drivers. Survival demands that we desire food, water and reproductive success. But desires can also as explained be expanded to new areas and influenced by the internalization of experiences and values.

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<sup>82</sup> The examples are from Thaler and Sunstein, 2008, pp 22-31

<sup>83</sup> Markova, 1987, p 244 ff

<sup>84</sup> Sterelny, 2003, p 152

- A capability can be a ‘pre-programmed blank slate’ but possible to develop. Our reasoning is one example. The ability to reason is innate but the way to reason is acquired. Our ability to play an instrument is another example. When we develop such a skill the area in the cortex that is originally set aside for the ability is allowed to expand. Conscious reasoning is as described not part of what the subconscious amygdale does; nor are reasoned beliefs automatically internalized.

It seems that we have a predisposition to believe that more features are innate than they actually are proved to be. Sigmund Freud claimed, inspired by Darwin, that sex and aggression are the central instincts that motivate human behaviour. Modern evolutionary psychology<sup>85</sup> has taken his reasoning and clinical experiences one step further and now talks about three basic “drivers” supporting natural selection: *reproductive success* – the capacity to survive and produce viable offspring; *inclusive fitness* – to care for close relatives with whom you share genes; *reciprocal altruism* – the tendency to help one another out to mutual benefit. There seems to be good reasons to believe that those “drivers” are genetically coded. The research on fixed-action patterns that has been described earlier seems to support the view that inclusive fitness is a genetically inherited feature. The question mark is around reciprocal altruism; the research does not indisputably show to what degree the feature is part of the genetic inheritance or the ecological.

Self-awareness and other-awareness are gained successively during the upbringing.<sup>86</sup> The ability to separate own reactions from those of others is developed over time. There seems to be a mirror neuron system in several parts of the brain that lets us *experience other people’s feelings*, an ability that supports this development.<sup>87</sup> The feature was first discovered in monkeys. Scientists were studying how neurons were firing when a monkey was planning or carrying out movements, such as reaching for a banana. What they found was that the same neurons were firing in a monkey that was looking at another monkey reaching for a banana. Evolutionary biologists have highlighted this interaction with others as an important driver of evolution. We have the ability to empathize with other human beings, both cognitively and emotionally

There are many different forms of less ‘ingrained’ mental shortcuts termed *judgmental heuristics*, many still to be uncovered.<sup>88</sup> Some of them are genetically coded, some of them learned, conditioned. It is not always easy to separate the inherited shortcuts from the acquired. Sometimes they are interlinked.

An important conclusion of the contemporary research is that *values* that are held consciously and subconsciously can differ quite significantly, just as other beliefs differ. The values that people cherish consciously are often more ‘ethical’ than those they hold subconsciously. The subconscious processes works with stereotypes that by their very nature are prejudicial and is organizing people in an ‘us and them’. Stereotypes are important and necessary devices to

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<sup>85</sup> Westen, 2007, pp 70-76

<sup>86</sup> Markova, 1987 chapter 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>87</sup> Westen, 2007, p 288

<sup>88</sup> See Chaiken & Trope, 1999 and Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky (Eds.), 1982

enable the individual to respond fast enough to people and events, but the stereotypes are not automatically supportive of ideas such as the equality of men. We may consciously reject racism but be the victims of subconscious racist attitudes at the same time. How this works is already explained.

Surveys have shown that most people around the world share the same ethical values when asked. Many wish to see this result as a proof that man is born good and that there is a genetic character to values. But this is too hasty a conclusion. When people answer to a survey it is their conscious self that is doing the answering and those answers can differ quite a lot from the values held subconsciously. Market surveyors are well aware of this phenomenon.

When people are seen as naturally 'evil' it can also be due to an insufficient control of the subconscious processes. It takes a developed ventromedial prefrontal cortex to control the emotions that the subconscious information systems signal; that part of the front lobe may in some individuals be weak, less developed or badly 'programmed' during the up-bringing.

Both conscious and subconscious values are thus – with the exception of some inherited evolutionary features such as 'the family value' Inclusive Fitness – acquired, but they are acquired in different ways. Conscious values can be reasoned, while subconscious values are acquired mainly through internalization during the childhood. Children learn what they should or should not from parents and the wider society. Internalization is not very different from learning by experiencing. Children get motivated by the positive response from parents, teachers and the like to pick up some values and inhibited by their scolding or punishments to hold others. But the end result may be different. Whilst experiences are mostly connected with wishes or fears, values are often connected to sentiments such as pride and shame, enthusiasm and anger. The reason is that values are integrated in the *self-image*. They define how the child wants to be, how she wants to be seen and how she wants others to be.

What needs to be understood is, however, that the values can be changed if the circumstances change and that they need to be kept alive. Europeans still remember how whole populations in Germany, Austria and Poland that were brought up with Christian values, could go along with the extermination of Jews, Roma and Gays. Americans have still to struggle with the question how they could lose their way so fundamentally after 9/11, allowing torture and denying foreigners their human rights.

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence showing that values, also subconscious values, are possible to influence and change. The military methods for 'brain-washing' are well-known examples of how values can be changed. The training of recruits in the US Marines or a European parachute troop is in principle built on lessons from these exercises. The soldiers have often a less fortunate background and the aim of the training is to give them firm and coherent values.

Other examples of value-building are the religious fundamentalist schools such as the Moslem 'madras' and the Jewish Orthodox schools. Both types of schools are teaching the children that they belong to a selected few that are closer to God than other believers and they learn how to despise the non-believers. The children are pressed to work hard, which make them

more likely to work on ‘auto-pilot’ and less likely to reflect, and they are kept isolated from other children, which deflects dissonant information.

Many workplaces such as the financial institutions in the City and Wall Street have strong subcultures that differ from the values of the society as a whole. Young graduates are, however, quickly adapting to the values of the sub-culture. The fact that the new-comers, just as the children in the madras schools, have to work very hard forces them to accept more and question less consciously, which makes them more susceptible to the sub-culture values.

## 8. THE MOST IMPORTANT “DRIVERS”

The third question raised earlier in this chapter was if the three ‘drivers’ of man – desire, reason and thymos - as identified in the philosophical tradition are the three features that political philosophers and economists should give the greatest attention or if there are other ‘drivers’ that are as important.

It has already been recognized that *desiring* is an important feature of human nature. *Desiring* originates from the brainstem and amygdale and it is expanded in scope by valuing, experiencing and through networks of associations. But experiences connected with negative emotions are also remembered subconsciously, *fear* being the strongest reaction. One lesson learned from contemporary research is not to underestimate the power over the minds of people that can be achieved by installing fear. Desiring and fearing are two features of human nature that have to be seen in parallel.

The second important ‘driver’, identified already by Socrates, is our reasoning ability. What we have learned is, as explained, that we make decisions on two levels, consciously and subconsciously. The ability to *reason* is found in the cortex and has thus been added quite late in the evolution chain. The ability is part of a genetic heritage, but how to reason logically is something we are taught. The main claim in this inquiry is that there is a simplified cognition process, sometimes called *on-line processing*, that is going on subconsciously, that it is the dominant decision-maker in our lives, and that it is involved in almost everything we do, also our conscious reasoning.

Researchers have also confirmed that Socrates ‘thymos’ is a reality. Man has a ‘self-serving bias’, a tendency to believe the best of him and explain away the worst, even if the tendency varies with age, gender and culture<sup>89</sup>. The self-esteem is linked to the drive to defend this self-image, *to be recognized* as the person we want to be seen as. The old philosophical term *thymos* will henceforth be used to cover both (1) the self-esteem and (2) the struggle to be recognized by others the way an individual wants to be seen, i.e. his self-image.

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<sup>89</sup> Mezelius, Abramson, Hyde, and Hankin, 2004, pp.711-747

Thymos seems to play a fundamental role in the genetic heritage. It is important for reproductive success, for survival. We feel pride when we are recognized for the man we want to be seen as; we feel shame when we have failed to live up to our own self-image. We feel enthusiasm when someone is expressing values we share and we feel anger if we or the values that we stand for are met with disrespect. Those are strong feelings and they protect our self-image.

When the self-image is threatened we feel uncomfortable<sup>90</sup>; that is, if we have a high self-esteem. If you have a low self-esteem you can feel uncomfortable if you *surpass* expectations<sup>91</sup>. Hegel would not have been surprised of these findings. High self-esteem (thymos) is to be found in “masters”, low thymos in “servants”. Thymos values thus not only own recognition, self-esteem, but also the recognition of the groups (stereotypes) with which an individual identifies himself. He is concerned if the group to which he feels a belonging is attacked or discredited. Already Socrates pointed out that the thymos of “guardians” included a willingness to stand up and aggressively fight for the whole community and that such a commitment was important for the survival of the community. He has been vindicated. An example: Half a century ago a young social psychologist infiltrated a group that thought the world would end December 21 that year.<sup>92</sup>When the prophecy failed the leader got a new vision: The world was saved because of the faith of their little band. Soon the members of the group were out on the streets again, talking about the miracle and trying to win proselytes. So strong was their commitment to the group and the need to justify it to keep their own self-esteem.

The protection of the self-image gives the subconscious a strong incentive to attach positive features to the category with which he identifies and suppress any negative such features. The identity includes not only the self but also the stereotypes with which he identifies himself. “I am a man and identify myself with men; I am from Sweden and I identify myself with Swedes etc.” Thymos is as the defender of the identity and the self-image an indispensable part of the human being and part of the genetic heritage; desiring is not enough for survival. The individual needs to be able to stand up and fight, for him and for the groups to which he belongs. The evolutionary drivers, ‘reproductive success’ and ‘inclusive fitness’, are both dependant on that feature. Low thymos is nothing desirable; low self-esteem can be the root of many individual problems and get anyone into trouble.

The self-image that the thymos is protecting is as explained strongly affected *by internalized values*. The Enlightenment philosophers were therefore partly fighting the wrong battle. They were right in arguing strongly in favour of a general acceptance of ethical values such as equality, fairness and justice but they should not have fought thymos. It is a fight that cannot be won.

Hegel claimed that the willingness to sacrifice his life is what made man man and that a man should demand recognition for that willingness. He was right to highlight thymos but he was

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<sup>90</sup> Thibodeau and Aronson, 1992 pp 591-602

<sup>91</sup> Travis and Aronson, 2008, pp 29-32

<sup>92</sup> Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter, 1956

wrong in assuming that it had to be connected to physical violence. The struggle for recognition is an important driver of man, but the self-image that thymos defends has changed over time. The willingness to sacrifice one's life was a brain-child of the values of the pre-Enlightenment time. Most people, at least most Europeans, are now living in another culture with other sets of values. Children may after a contemporary upbringing want to see themselves not as warriors but as honest and decent human beings, as successful professionals, and good citizens of the community, and can be prepared to fight hard through other means than violence for being recognized as such beings. The reward they may be happy to receive is a fulfilment of some of their desires.

The Rational Choice Theory perceives men as rational if and only if they intelligently pursue their self-interest, and nothing else. This oversight has tried to show that man is much more complex than that and driven as much by fears and desires that do not necessarily pass a reasoned scrutiny, and by a thymos that demands recognition by others.

Evolutionary biologists see besides Inclusive Fitness and Reproductive Success also Reciprocal Altruism, the tendency to help one another out to mutual benefit, as one of the drivers of human evolution. I have already discussed the scientific basis for this claim. We clearly have a capacity to trust others and a preparedness to help them out in an expectancy of mutuality. But how much of this feature that is innate and how much that is part of an ecological inheritance and related to survival, the need for recognition and the other features, which I have discussed here, is not obvious to me. Adam Smith recognizes sympathy, generosity and public spirit as important features limiting the role of 'self-love', but while those features luckily enough are common, they seem to be steered in different ways in diverse cultures, leaving me with the suspicion that they are mainly linked to the ecological inheritance – an important inheritance non the less.

The conclusion is that *desiring, fearing, logical reasoning, on-line processing* and *thymos* are important “drivers” to consider when discussing governance systems.

## 9. ALIGNING THE CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS SELVES

The subconscious self does most of the work. Nothing else would be possible. The body receives millions and millions of bits of information every second through the senses and the subconscious self responds to almost all of those stimuli. With the help of shortcuts supported by stereotypes the subconscious self steers the individual in his daily life, helps him to walk the stairs, to cross the street, to drive the car, to respond to encounters, compliments and threats. There is usually no problem with that. The conscious self can after all override the subconscious self whenever it wishes; or at least that is what it believes.

The reality is more complex. Often we find ourselves responding in a way that we regret afterwards. Why did I not think first before answering, we ask ourselves? *The subconscious self can be too quick.* There are some shortcuts that are so strongly supported by genetic or

ecological inheritance that the conscious self does not get a chance to think. Obvious ones are related to evolutionary concepts such as ‘Inclusive fitness’ – to care for close relatives with whom you share genes and ‘Reciprocal altruism’ – the tendency to help one another out to mutual benefit. But there are more such strong shortcuts and researchers are increasingly uncovering them.

In those situations we can at least become aware of being “cheated” by our subconscious self. But there are situations when the subconscious self is acting to protect the individual from knowing. This is the case when the thymos is under threat. The most common situation is the cognitive dissonance<sup>93</sup>. It is an unpleasant feeling, a state of tension, which occurs when a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent, such as “Smoking is a dumb thing because it could kill me” and “I smoke two packs a day”. People do not rest easy until they find a way of dealing with the dissonance. The positive way of dealing with it is to be rational and e.g. stop smoking.

But when there is no such simple way of dealing with the dissonance or when it would threaten the self-esteem to admit a mistake the subconscious initiates the psychological mechanism called *self-justification*. This mechanism can be very strong. The subconscious self can for example induce false memories and prevent the conscious self from reasoning.

How we handle inconsistencies has been the subject of philosophical discussion all since Socrates. Protagoras challenged Socrates, according to Plato, when Protagoras found Socrates to illogically approve of a poem that contained contradictions. Socrates “invented” a series of explanations, none of which really convinced Protagoras. Michel Billig suggests that the most interesting question may be not how consistency operates but how people cope with inconsistency.<sup>94</sup>

### *Confirmation bias*

The first line of defence that the self-justification process applies against cognitive dissonance is the *confirmation bias*. The subconscious self prevents the conscious self to address the rational arguments. The reasoning circuits are “blocked”, by what is sometimes called *emotional constraints*. Biases are supported by networks of association. They can, as in the case of flying, be strongly protected by emotional constraints, but they can also be of a very temporary nature following e.g. anchoring and priming, and can influence also conscious reasoning.

Scientists have shown in experiments how the confirmation bias works. In one experiment<sup>95</sup> Drew Westen and his colleagues processed dissonant and consonant information about George Bush and John Kerry to partisans with different biases. The partisans were monitored and their brain activities followed with the help of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). When confronted with troubling information, such as when their favourite candidate was expressing contradictory views on the same issue, the network of neurons that produces

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<sup>93</sup> Festinger, 1957

<sup>94</sup> Billig, 1987 pp. 164-165.

<sup>95</sup> Westen, Kilts, Blagov et.al., 2006, pp 1947-1958

distress became active. Distress seems to be a reaction that triggers the self-justification mechanism. The subconscious self solved the dissonance quickly. The researchers found that the reasoning areas of the brains were virtually shut down when the participants were confronted with the dissonant information. The neural circuits charged with regulation of emotional states seemed instead to recruit faulty beliefs that eliminated the distress. When the subconscious self had restored consonance the partisan brains turned on the circuits that create positive emotions. The participants therefore left the experiment even more convinced about their partisan beliefs than before. The confirmation bias protected them from facing the dissonance that they did not want to be aware of. David O Sears has developed a theory for the role of affect in symbolic politics that is consistent with these findings. Often used political terms can be linked to emotions and when man is faced with the terms they initialize a ‘shortcut’ reaction. Sears calls this *symbolic predisposition*.<sup>96</sup>

Other experiments have shown that people when exposed to articles on highly charged questions have found ways of discarding those that are dissonant with their strongly held opinions. Even lack of evidence has been proven to be accepted as support of partisan beliefs.

Another example: In 2003 it had become abundantly clear that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Democrats, who had been against the war in the first place, concluded that the president had lied, or at least was eager to listen to faulty information. Americans who had supported the war and believed in President Bush’s reason for launching it were on the other hand thrown into dissonance. Travis-Aronson found<sup>97</sup> that more than half of the Republicans resolved the dissonance by refusing to accept evidence. They even told a Knowledge Networks poll that they believed that weapons of mass destruction had been found – a research result that may have been affected by their choice of news outlets that reinforced their beliefs.

A high self-esteem can be an asset when addressing difficult problems that need to be taken care of, especially if a quick decision has to be made based on incomplete information. A strong thymos is often linked to leadership qualities; it can be perceived as charisma when combined with other personality features. But high self-esteem can also lead the owner astray as his need for self-justification when faced with cognitive dissonance can be more pressing.

There is a way around the confirmation bias and Westen has pointed it out<sup>98</sup>. If you want to argue with someone and convince the individual you should strive to evoke positive emotions and to make the listener feel that you have shared, cherished values. Positive emotions unblock the reasoning part of the brain (the conscious self) and give the thymos a way out of the cognitive dissonance: “I have always believed those values to be the most important to me, and I have just come to realize that there is a better way to feel good about myself”.

There is also the possibility that attitudes can be altered in order that the individual may have a consistent outlook at the world. There is a theory that if there is a discrepancy between our

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<sup>96</sup> Sears in Kuklinski, 2009

<sup>97</sup> Travis and Aronson, 2008, pp 18-19

<sup>98</sup> Westen, 2007 p xv

actions and our attitudes; it is the attitudes which will be changed to be brought in line with the actions.<sup>99</sup>

### *Rationalization*

Dissonance theory has challenged behaviourism. Behaviourism fitted the Locke-Hobbes thinking. With rewards and punishments behaviour could be affected and desires reconciled with reason. The behavioural laws work on humans, but they are not the whole truth. Elliot Aronson has for example shown that if people get through a great deal of pain, discomfort, effort, or embarrassment to get something, they will be happier with that “something” than if it came to them easily.

In an experiment with the colleague Judson Mills<sup>100</sup> he invited Stanford students to join a discussion group on the psychology of sex. Half of them were accepted effortlessly to the group while half of them had to go through an embarrassing initiation procedure. Each student listened after the acceptance to a boring and worthless audiotape from an alleged discussion in the group. Those that had been easily accepted found the discussion to be as lousy as it was, while those that had gone through an initiation process found the discussion to be interesting and exciting and they were full of excuses for the stammering and awkward statements of some of the participants. Even after having been told how the experiment had been done they persisted in claiming that they found the discussion on the audiotape to be on a high level and that their acclaim had nothing to do with the initiation process.

This is one experiment that shows how strong the self-justification process is; so strong is the need to justify actions, beliefs or opinions in order not to shatter the self-esteem that people do not see what has happened even if they are informed about how they have been “manipulated.” It is important to understand, as it explains why we are so reluctant to admit to mistakes. We are unaware of how the self-justification process has taken care of the “cognitive dissonance” and truly believe what we say. Suppressed emotions can betray what is going on to the observer, but our conscious selves know nothing about it.

### *One step at a time*

Researchers have, not very surprisingly, found that it is easier for the subconscious self to solve dissonance, if the gap between the beliefs is relatively small. The social psychologist Judgson Mills studied how attitudes towards cheating changed when children were exposed to temptation<sup>101</sup>. Children were given the chance to cheat without risk of being discovered in order to pass a difficult test. Those that cheated were afterwards more understanding towards cheating while those that had resisted had hardened their attitude. The changed attitudes were the result of their respective self-justification processes. Travis-Aronson calls it a “*Pyramid of Choice*”. The children had been on the top of the pyramid of choices before the test, they had now taken one step down, but on opposite sides.

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<sup>99</sup> Billig, 1987, p 175

<sup>100</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, pp 14-17

<sup>101</sup> Mills, 1958, pp 517-531

If you are subjected to a series of such choices you have only to justify one step at a time. The self-justification mechanism ensures that you do not have to face the fact that you already have taken one or several steps down the pyramid. Researchers have shown that you may end up making a choice you would never have done if you had faced it to start with. The social psychologist Stanley Milgram<sup>102</sup> was the first one to do a thoroughly scientific study of the one-step-at-a-time justification process. A research subject was asked to respond to questions. The participants in the experiment were told to administer an electric shock every time the subject responded falsely. The voltage was increased, but not drastically, each time the subject could not answer correctly. “The experiment requires that you continue”, the participants were told. In the famous study two-thirds of the participants ended up administering what they thought were life-threatening levels of electric shocks to the subject. The experiment showed both the power of step-to-step justification and of authority.

How someone step by step can be coerced to do things he would normally never do has been described by several participants in the Watergate scandal. Jeb Stuart Magruder<sup>103</sup> has very honestly told how he justified to himself one step at a time ending up doing things he today finds morally outrageous. Tavis and Aronson explain how politicians can be caught up in conflict of interests with lobbyists by allowing themselves to be involved one step at a time: “When they first enter politics, they accept lunch with a lobbyist, because, after all, that’s how politics works and it’s an efficient way to get information on a bill {...} Once you {...} justify it that way, however, you have started your slide down the pyramid. If you had lunch with a lobbyist to talk about the pending legislation, why not talk things over on the local golf course? {...} And if you talked things over at the local course, why not accept a friendly offer to play golf with him or her – say, in St Andrews in Scotland?”<sup>104</sup>

### *Selective and false memories*

It is a myth that man remembers everything. There is no space in the brain for such a memory. The memory of the subconscious self works, as described, as a running tally. The stimulus, experiences or internalizations leading to the memories are forgotten. But the conscious self is neither remembering as well as we may wish. This is a quite recent realization. We remember only things that have been central to us. We can on the other hand do that very accurately.

It was not all that long ago when psychologists tried to ‘recover’ memories from childhood of e.g. incest and abuse. They have now come to realize that in many cases they actually induced false memories.<sup>105</sup> It happens that memories are suppressed, in cases of accidents for instance. But the most likely situation, in the cases of abuses, is that if they have really happened, that the victims remember them. The problem for people who have had traumatic experiences is not that they forget them but that the memories return all too often.<sup>106</sup> Survivors of Camp

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<sup>102</sup> Milgram, 1963 pp 371-378

<sup>103</sup> Magruder, 1974

<sup>104</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, pp 45-46. Congressman Tom DeLay, former leader of the House Republicans had to the shock of his supporters accepted a trip to St Andrews with Jack Ambroff, a corrupt lobbyist-turned-informer.

<sup>105</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, pp

<sup>106</sup> McNally, 2003

Erika, a Nazi concentration camp, were asked 40 years afterwards to write down their memories. Those were compared with the depositions they had provided when they had been released and the researchers found a remarkable consistency. A few violent events had been forgotten by some of the survivors but otherwise they remembered every detail in the way they remembered them forty years earlier.

The memory cannot be trusted when it comes to less central events. The researchers have shown that the memory is “adjusted” to protect the self-image. Self-justification is hard at work when it comes to memories. Embarrassing episodes are conveniently forgotten and history is rewritten to make man look good. Every time he tells his story he may make it better and better from his point of view until he may talk about something that has never happened. Everyone does it, not just the politicians.

The eyesight is perfect only in a restricted area. That is why the eyes have to wander around to capture a new sight. But the memory steps in. The perfect picture of what the eye just had seen remains with the individual as his eyes move on. If he with one glance recognizes his wife coming home the memory fills in all the rest. He thinks he has seen all of her, but he may just have missed that she has a new haircut. A memory of a central event can be both exact and imprecise. The memory is exact when it comes to the actions of a person or persons central to the event, but inexact when it comes to the surroundings or the doings of other persons. The memory may even have filled in that part from a totally different event.

It is not all that difficult to induce false memories. Tarvis and Aronson have given numerous examples of how interrogators have been able to implant false memories in suspects to get false confessions; leading to convictions that have later been overturned as DNA-tests have cleared the suspects. The technique that is actually endorsed in the bible of interrogation methods<sup>107</sup> promotes the introduction of fictitious evidence to make the suspect confused. In the known cases of false confessions the suspects have in addition been subjected to long stressful interrogations and often been teenagers. If you can implant false memories with such limited methods, how about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay? With sleep deprivation and water boarding the torturers can in principle implant any false memories they wish for.

Calculations of false convictions based on the extrapolations from the cases that have been investigated indicate that over 28 500 suspects have been falsely convicted and imprisoned in the US during the last 15 years.<sup>108</sup> The false convictions have in some cases been overturned because of new methods for analyzing evidence, such as DNA tests. In many cases the convictions have been partly based on false confessions. One would expect FBI and prosecutors to be quite concerned. Travis and Aronson have found that most of them are not and the bible is still in use. The reason is that self-justification works also on a collective level. The reputation and the self-esteem of the police corps and of the prosecutors are at stake and therefore they often refuse to accept that they have coerced false confessions, even in the face of overwhelming evidence, according to Travis and Aronson.

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<sup>107</sup> Inbau, Reid, Buckley, and Jayne

<sup>108</sup> Samuel R Gross et al, 2004

## Aggression

When man can find no way to justify himself he can become aggressive. That seems to be the last resort for the subconscious self. Fyodor Dostoyevsky has told the following story: The scoundrel Fyodor Pavlovitch recalls “how he had once in the past been asked, ‘Why do you hate so and so, so much? And he had answered them, with his shameless impudence, ‘I’ll tell you. He has done me no harm. But I played him a dirty trick, and ever since I have hated him’”.<sup>109</sup>

If an individual has done someone else an injustice it can create distress. That triggers, as well known by now, the self-justification process. The self-esteem is at stake. For cases such as these the subconscious self has another self-justification process in store.

The individual becomes aggressive, starts to find new, even imagined, faults with the victim of his actions.<sup>110</sup> This process is seen in the escalation of conflicts to wars. For anyone leading a country in war it is a must to dehumanize the other side. It is part of the training of soldiers that they are made to believe that the others are evil; that the soldiers are fighting on the side of the good. How can a soldier otherwise lift his gun and shoot to kill a boy he has never met? The degrading treatment of Iraqi and Afghan prisoners of war in the hands of US and British soldiers has to be understood in the light of how these soldiers have been manipulated. When the torturers inflicted pain on the prisoners of Abu Ghraib the reports seem to indicate that they came to despise their victims even more, which gave them the incentive to degrade them one step further. That would be a natural and expected reaction.

War feeds war in a vicious circle. It is hard to get out of such a circle. A positive finding is that research shows that it is possible to create virtuous circles. If someone is asking you a favour, and you help the individual out, you are more likely to think well of that person afterwards. By asking for your help the individual has bolstered your self-esteem and made you feel good.

## Affect

Another “distortion” of the hierarchy between the conscious self and the subconscious self is the response to *fear*. The subconscious self “takes over the show” when a stimulus is triggering a strong negative response. Man responds without thinking to a physical threat. But reasoning can be blocked even if the threat is not imminent. This is the case if the individual has been intimidated to fear someone or something. Such a situation is also triggering a self-justification process; it helps to explain away the dissonance when the response is inconsistent with the internalized values.

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted from Travis-Aronson

<sup>110</sup> Tavis and Aronson, 2008, pp 27-29

The political scientist Ted Brader<sup>111</sup> carried out a content analysis of over 1,500 political advertisements from the US 2004 election to provide insights as to how the emotions of enthusiasm and fear are used to influence potential voters and has found that the impact is substantial. The results from research done by Brader, Marcus and his colleagues on political processes are clear: Subtle visual and audio cues affect voters' emotions, not least those of informed and interested voters. When exposed to positive emotional campaigning (via media, ads, speeches etc) the voters respond with enthusiasm when the incoming information is in line with the confirmation bias. But the research also shows that those that have an opposite bias become frustrated and respond with increased partisanship.

Emotionally negative campaigning creates in an analogous way fears and those alert the conscious rational selves. Fear breaks habitual routines and direct attention to relevant portions of the environment and any information that may help address the threat.<sup>112</sup> It activates thinking about alternative courses of action. Fear and negative mood states encourage systematic evaluations and conscious processing of information.<sup>113</sup>

Voters who are anxious thus tend to gather more information and reflect more. Marcus and McKuen have also studied how moods affect elections and have found that voters when in a calm mood have been voting mainly based on their party identification and other partisan cues (symbolic preconditions). When in anxiety they have been much more issue-oriented and have been acting more in line with the rational choice theory.<sup>114</sup> Gerald L Clore and Linda M Isbell have together with other researchers uncovered that happy persons are more likely to 'shortcut' than a sad person who will be more reluctant to take quick decisions and more prone to reasoning.<sup>115</sup> At the same time a happy person is more creative. The conclusion by Marcus and MacKuen is that democracy works better when the voters feel some anxiety.

Brader, Marcus and colleagues have found that voters that are generally more educated and more knowledgeable in political issues are the ones that respond the strongest to messages with an emotional cue. They are also more likely to respond to anxiety by activating themselves and change opinion. When in fear they vote less based on preconditioned biases and more on basis of actual information.

The result that fear should make voters act more rationally seems counter-intuitive. People are obviously not immune to collective intimidation affecting the general mood. Machiavelli has explained how a skilful leader can create a climate in which he can make people agree to actions that they would never concur to if they were guided by reason. The bullies on the schoolyards have always known how to install fear in others to get their way. Brader admits that the technique also can be used to manipulate people. Politicians may knowingly present information in a way that leads citizens to behave contrary to their true interests. If emotional cues are added to create fear the effect can be strengthened considerably and voters can be manipulated to act far from rational.

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<sup>111</sup> Brader, 2006

<sup>112</sup> Brader, 2006, pp 57, 58

<sup>113</sup> Öhman in Lewis Havilland-Jones (ed.) 2000, pp 573-93

<sup>114</sup> Marcus-MacKuen in Kuklinski (ed), 2009, p 55-62

<sup>115</sup> Clore and Isbell, in Kuklinski (ed), 2009, p 116-118

There seems, however, to be another explanation. Brader, Marcus and their colleagues have been looking at ideal cases in which legitimate messages have been strengthened by emotional cues. Westen and colleagues have investigated how negative campaigning has worked in reality. They have studied a number of elections among others the 2004 presidential campaign. They have shown that the parallel processing by the subconscious and the conscious selves are not always that parallel. Westen explains: “In our study, only *after* partisans had come to emotionally biased judgments did we see any activation in circuits usually associated with reasoning, suggesting that they had begun to develop rationalizations for their emotional biases.”<sup>116</sup> That a voter gives more attention to an issue, when he is scared, does not necessarily mean that he is reasoning more. The truth can be the opposite. Conscious attention is not the same thing as conscious reasoning.

Westen has especially studied “*hidden*” *racist and xenophobic messages* and has found that they often create an anxiety that makes the subjects more receptive to the main message.

This is especially the case if the emotional cues are *subliminal*, i.e. presented faster than the conscious self can register them.<sup>117</sup> The voters may believe that they have done an independent rational analysis, whilst the subconscious has reached a conclusion that the self-justification system has helped them to rationalize. Whether they act on this information is not a given. It depends on whether they deem the recommended course of action to be effective (*response efficacy*) or see themselves as capable of taking that action (*self-efficacy*)<sup>118</sup>. When fear is strong and perceived efficacy low, individuals are more likely to engage in defensive behaviour such as denial and avoidance.<sup>119</sup>

Researchers have so far mostly concentrated on the effects on decision-making by temporary emotions of fear and enthusiasm. Kuklinski asks in relation to Marcus/MacKuen’s result: “But what about the situation in which anxiety seems to overwhelm everything else?”<sup>120</sup> The question is highly relevant as the Western world just has been through a ‘reign of fear’. Men who are living under an alleged threat during a long period of time are more likely to respond with fear than with anger and therefore probably more prepared to give up some of their freedom for security. Fear can be installed by *intimidation*, often used within and between systems. Judges can e.g. sometimes be intimidated by the Executive or by media. Such intimidation can, as explained by Travis-Aronson, lead to less reasoned decisions and to irrational self-justification processes that are explaining away the dissonance.

People who are intimidated and afraid are also less likely to scrutinize the reasons for fear as the role of their reasoning conscious self is restricted by their need for self-justification. But unjustified fear can most likely also wear off over time. If someone cries ‘wolf’ too many times and the wolf never shows up people may stop listening.

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<sup>116</sup> Westen, 2007, p 351

<sup>117</sup> Westen, 2007, p 58

<sup>118</sup> Rogers, 1983, pp 153-76

<sup>119</sup> Witte, in Andersen and Guerrero (ed) 1988, pp 423-50

<sup>120</sup> Kuklinski, 2009, p 13

Research done by e.g. Arne Ohman suggests that moods have a similar effect as emotions. It also seems that they can be additive and compensating, but more research needs to be done. The Behavioural Information System (not to be confused with the Behavioural Inhibition System) identified by Gray informs us about our mood. When the system focuses on ourselves “changes in our mood, from gloomy to enthusiastic, tell us that we are bursting with confidence, energy, and eagerness. Alternatively when our mood changes in the direction of depression, we conclude that we are exhausted, and beaten”. When the system focuses on those we are identified with “our moods reflect what we have recently experienced. Our trust has been confirmed or we have been disappointed and let down. When focused on ourselves, these feelings gauge self-mastery; when attendant on those we rely upon, these feelings gauge our confidence and trust in others. According to Gray, the moods of depression-enthusiasm provide crucial ongoing information on how well we are conducting ourselves and how well our previously learned behaviours are enacted”<sup>121</sup> In that way the system is informing us about the state of our thymos.

Researchers have also recognized the need for more knowledge on how other emotions are evoked and work. One hypothesis is that there are similar disposition and surveillance systems related also to emotions such as empathy, love, hate etc. It could e.g. be expected that external stimuli, which can affect thymos, are evaluated in a similar way: confirming stimuli can lead to pride, threats to thymos to anger. Some evolutionary biologists have launched the idea that a way to see the inherited, mostly subconscious, structure is to see it as multi-modular, with a lot of domain-specific cognitive devices adapted for different situations.<sup>122</sup>

## 10. THE CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The final, fifth, question that was asked in this chapter was how dependent we humans are on the cultural conditions and the ecological inheritance. The answer to that question has to a certain extent already been given. Contemporary research seems to indicate that we have a tendency to overestimate the role of the genetic inheritance and underestimate the importance of the ecological inheritance.

This has in my understanding to do with how we remember. The subconscious memories are functioning as a running tally; they are updated with new experiences and knowledge, but we do not remember why we have come to have the beliefs we have. They all form an intrinsic knowledge about life and the fact that most of this knowledge is acquired is not something we are aware of.

The subconsciously stored knowledge relates to our immediate situation and the relations to others such as our parents, friends etc, but it has also a considerable component of knowledge

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<sup>121</sup> Marcus-McKuen in Kuklinski(ed), 2009, p 45

<sup>122</sup> An idea promoted by N. Chomsky among others.

around *the relations to the collective other*<sup>123</sup>. An important part of that knowledge constitutes what is sometimes called *common sense*. It is a concept that summarizes our internalization of cultural and ecological prescriptions on how to respond in different situations to external stimulus and to changing environmental conditions. The development of a common sense is part of our socialization process. What is common sense in Texas is, however, not necessarily what is common sense in Tokyo or Islamabad. The cultural conditions in which we are brought up have thus a major impact on how we act when on ‘autopilot’.

The stereotypes that the subconscious selves are using when ‘short-cutting’ are also culture-sensitive, as are the values we internalize. These are all factors that make democracy such a vulnerable proposition. The conditions for a successful implementation and maintenance of such a system are far from present everywhere and in every situation.

The effect culture has on us is, however, a two-way street. Minorities can affect and change the perceptions of a majority, especially if the majority is striving for consensus.

The fact that we as collectives are so strongly affected by our ecological inheritance also puts limits on how far we can hope to come in issues around global governance. A shared value-base cannot be taken for granted. It also explains why people in general want social conditions to be decided as close to them as possible and within their own cultural framework.

## 11. KEY FINDINGS

In this overview the objective is *to extract the features in the contemporary understanding of human nature* that are deemed especially relevant for the inquiry; the presumption is that those scientific findings of the last decades can be helpful when re-examining the foundation of the governance of the societal systems, even if research is uncovering new aspects more or less daily. It is neither possible nor necessary to develop a complete model of human nature; it is enough for this purpose to identify features of specific interest from a societal governance point of view.

### *We are mostly on ‘auto-pilot’, taking most decisions subconsciously*

The common perception is that man is one coherent person. Contemporary research shows that it may on the contrary be more accurate to view the human being not as one ‘system’, but as a ‘system of systems’, systems that are built according to different principles and that are in constant and potential conflicts, conflicts which we humans continuously struggle to reconcile. We humans are *inconsistent*. The most striking finding in the on-going research of human nature is perhaps the role of the subconscious. Much more is happening subconsciously than we have been aware of.

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<sup>123</sup> About human awareness in a societal context see Markova, 1987, ch. 7.

The researchers have especially uncovered how important subconscious processes are in most of the human decision-making. The conscious and subconscious processes often work in concert; sometimes conscious reasoning is activated, sometimes blocked. Conscious thought process regularly also involves subconscious processes, but there are also complete processes that are totally outside conscious attention. Such processes are fundamentally different from those of the conscious reasoning. They ‘short-cut’, use stereotypes and work in a different way to the conscious processes. This is important to recognize as the subconscious decisions can be partly based on other values and desires than those we hold consciously. Values and desires are generally acquired and influenced by the cultural environment, in which we grow up, but not all values are easily internalized in a way that affects the subconscious processes and not all subconscious desires are accepted consciously. The conclusion we draw or the action we take is thus dependent on the complex interplay of the conscious and subconscious processes, giving the issue of ‘rationality’ a whole new perspective. Risky- or non-risky behaviour in the market may express subconsciously held values.

Both conscious and subconscious processes are usually involved in everything we do. The researchers are starting to uncover the complexity. The subconscious self is learning in a different way to the conscious self. The subconscious self is not only genetically coded, it also learns by experience (including imitation), by trial and error. That is how it learns how to walk and drive a car. On-line thinking does not have to result from culturally held values but simply from personal habits, from automatisms – from non-thinking.

As relevant information is encountered, the subconscious self makes an evaluative judgment, but only keeps the running tally, simply retrieving and updating the summary evaluation with later information but forgetting the actual pieces of evidence that contributed to it. When an external stimulus is evaluated in this way in relation to the subconscious memories and values and the evaluation is leading to an automatic and fast response the process is often called a *shortcut*. Shortcuts are thus a type of networks that can be described as a simplified thinking.

One example may be helpful: When you learn how to drive a car your conscious self is hard at work. Your conscious attention is on every detail of the driving. But after a while you need less and less of conscious decision-making. You drive more or less “automatically”. Experienced drivers can use the time in the car to relax or think of other things while the “subconscious” takes over the driving. How many of us have not experienced that we are suddenly on the street of our home when we were supposed to be at the supermarket and do some shopping for the dinner? Our “subconscious” has taken us to our home without disturbing us. The conscious self can intervene in the driving whenever needed. Anyone who passes from Dover to Calais or the other way around knows that you need to give the driving attention not to start driving on the wrong side. The subconscious can also alert the conscious self. It does it through creating emotions which are consciously noted. Fear or unease created by the subconscious can alert us that the situation demands our conscious attention. A helpful way of understanding emotions is to see them as a signal system from the subconscious self to the conscious self. If they are expressed as feelings or suppressed depends on how the conscious self reacts.

Sometimes it can be quite hard to teach the subconscious something new, especially if the old knowledge is ‘locked’ with strong emotions. The subconscious is filled with ‘biases’. One example: Many people are afraid of flying. They often do it anyway as their conscious self can override the subconscious self and its unjustified beliefs. The thing is that they are not unjustified to the subconscious, because what is a justified belief to the subconscious is only what is genetically coded, imitated or experienced. And the subconscious does not like the experience of flying and expresses it through creating sentiments of fear. The conscious self is strongly aware of one memory: “It is statistically safe to fly” while the subconscious self is “locked” to another: “To fly feels dangerous”. A stimulus can awake different memories held by the “reasoning” conscious self and the “experiencing” subconscious self.

In epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge, the term epistemic norms is used for the criteria on which to base justified beliefs. The conscious self can be trained, and in schools it is trained, in deductive and logical reasoning. But it is impossible to reason with the subconscious. The ontology of the subconscious self refutes the epistemic norms of the conscious self. The only norm it accepts, besides the inherited beliefs and imitation, is experiencing. Air carriers know that and the programs that they have developed to “cure” fear of flying is all about experiencing, basically putting the person in the situation of the pilot and let him or her “experience” positive and satisfying control. That is the way to teach the subconscious self not to be afraid.

Consider Alice and Bob. They are two singles both living in cottages in a village outside London. They have the same academic background and they are both working in the City as accountants. They are both in need of a new car as their old ones are starting to cost too much to repair. Their need of a car is basically the same; they need to get to the railway station every day and they need a car for shopping and to meet friends. By chance they have come to the same car dealer to look for alternatives. When walking around Alice’s attention has been caught by a small red car with a very personal design and of a rather un-known brand. Bob has stopped in front of a larger grey car of a recognized brand with a distinctive presence and with a strong and fuel-efficient engine.

The emotions the cars have stirred have brought them to where they are. When they have been walking around in the premises of the car dealer their subconscious selves have been busy valuing the different options, signalling pleasure or displeasure at the different alternatives. Alice has painting as her secret hobby and is fascinated by the colour and form of things. She values beauty and is intrigued by the appearance of the small car. She can imagine herself seeing the car from the train when she gets home, feeling happy about owning such a work of art. Her value-scale and her associations are different from those of Bob. He is fascinated by mechanical toys and he is anxious to give the right impression, to be recognized by his peers. He can see his friends envy him for his new car and he can imagine the spinning sound of the engine when he accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 5,3 seconds. He really desires the car.

Alice and Bob happen to sit down with two different sales persons at the same time and as they are trained accountants they start to calculate the cost for owning the cars to find out if they can afford them. They both find that they really cannot meet the expenses of the new cars as things stand. They are experiencing a cognitive dissonance. On one hand they desire the new cars, an emotion inspired by the subconscious evaluation processes; on the other hand their conscious logical selves tell them they cannot afford them.

Alice that liked the red car very much, but not that much, decides to let her calculating mind win and abstains from buying the car. Besides, she did not like the sales person and she decides to go to another car-dealer next Saturday.

Bob, however, is hooked. He really desires the car and the car-dealer, who is very likeable and understands Bob, is describing the advantages of the car in a very knowledgeable way. He offers some extra features as part of the deal. They may not cost that much but they certainly increase the feeling of a very special car. The sales person has an authority about him and Bob wants to believe him. He starts to look at the calculations again: Maybe he has overestimated how much he will be driving, and perhaps he can take out costs for repair, for oil and the like; the car is after all new. And he will most certainly get a higher bonus next year, will he not? Bob has started a self-justification process to close his cognitive dissonance and to make him believe that the purchase of the car is a rational decision. He walks away happy with the contract in his pocket. The car is to be delivered in two weeks time. He is already preparing his story-line, his narrative. As his subconscious self only runs a memory in the form of a running tally it is up to his conscious self to “invent” a consistent justification.

The Alice and Bob example illustrates how intertwined the subconscious and conscious processes are and how present they are in most decision-making. The research has beyond doubt shown that rationality is a person-sensitive thing. It is obviously also a culture-sensitive concept. It is a question that begs an answer if Alice and Bob have been acting rationally in the given example. Both have been influenced by subconscious processes that are not necessarily logical in the choice of car to start with and finally when deciding whether to buy. Alice can by economists be seen as the more rational as she ends up taking a decision that is in line with her economic interests. Alice fits reasonably well into the Rational Choice Theory, while it is difficult to see Bob’s decision-making as rational in the way the theory expects it to be. Rationality is a relative concept. With 'rational', reasoned evidence-based decision-making I will in the following understand processes in which conscious reasoning in the end is “winning” over emotional impulses created by subconscious processes. Decisions are deemed to be unjustified when the self-justification processes have made us believe that the decisions are rational although they are not based on sound reasoning.

It is not that decisions supported mainly by subconscious processes have to differ from those taken consciously, and mostly they don't. When I stumble down to the corner shop in the morning to buy a croissant and a copy of The International Herald Tribune it is because I have tested the alternatives and have come to the conclusion that to start the morning with a café au lait and a croissant with a paper that actually is about real news is a good start of the day for me. Just because I am on 'auto-pilot' does not mean that I act in a different way than I would if I had sat down and consciously reflected about the alternatives.

The role of the subconscious self is steadily becoming more important as we need to make more and more choices in a short period of time as modern societies become ever more complex. A professor in literature complained in a radio program: "I increasingly feel as if I am on auto-pilot. I don't think, I don't have time to think". And she complained about the blogging culture. "There is nothing reflected in the blogs. People write without thinking; they just express themselves".

There seems to be a limit to how much we can consciously handle at a given moment of time. Some researchers are speculating that the reason why we have let ourselves be so influenced by branding and other emotional cues is the fact that we need that kind of short-cutting to manage our way in a society where the flow of information is steadily growing. The social psychologist Robert B. Cialdini explains:

"Modern life is different from any earlier time. Because of remarkable technological advances, information is burgeoning, choices and alternatives are expanding, knowledge is exploding. In this avalanche of change and choice, we have had to adjust. One fundamental adjustment has come in the way we make decisions. Although we all want to make the most thoughtful, fully considered decision possible in any situation, the changing form and accelerating pace of modern life frequently deprive us of the proper conditions for such careful analysis of all the relevant pros and cons. More and more we are forced to resort to another decision-making approach – a shortcut approach in which the decision to comply (or agree or believe or buy) is made on the basis of a single, usually reliable piece of information {...} Because of the increasing tendency for cognitive overload in our society, the prevalence of shortcut decision-making is likely to increase proportionately"<sup>124</sup> To which result stress and emotional overload contribute.

### *Values are acquired and not all are internalized*

*There is little, if any, evidence supporting the perception that values should be genetically inherited.* While evolutionary biologists claim that we are born with features that support survival and reproductive success - among them core 'family values' such as 'inclusive fitness' that strongly attaches us to those with whom we share genes - there is no evidence that more general values such as the equality of men, fairness and honesty are to be found in

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<sup>124</sup> Cialdini, 2001, pp 239-240

the genes. The finding offsets the idea that man is born with the innate moral value that we are all equals.

The values we hold consciously also differ from those that are supported by the subconscious processes. They are acquired in different ways - the conscious self through processes of reasoning and the subconscious mainly through internalizing. The internalizing can be of values that first are held consciously. The subconscious self of a child internalizes values by imitating, by being rewarded and punished. Values are taught by parents; they can be part of an ecological inheritance such as the language; languages emphasize different values; they can be part of a national heritage or the culture of a local community.

The conscious reasoning self may have learned additional values, such as the equality of man, but their internalization of such values in the subconscious is not as easy as it may seem. One reason is that the subconscious is dependent on stereotypes for its 'shortcutting'. The stereotypes tell the subconscious how it can expect other people or groups of people to be, and such perceptions can often be quite prejudicial. Ethical values such as tolerance and empathy with people who are different have an uphill struggle to be internalized.

The consequence is that the set of values that we apply when reasoning consciously to a certain extent differ from those set of values that we apply when doing our subconscious 'shortcutting'.

***To protect the self-esteem and to struggle for recognition is an important human feature.***

Socrates famously saw a tripartite soul in man: a desiring part, a reasoning part and ‘thymos’. The first two parts are easily recognized. Desiring started according to Socrates with our physical needs. Other philosophers have later highlighted the dynamic character of desires and how they are expanded as we are exposed to more and more desirable things. This perception is supported by contemporary research.

I have already discussed how we have come to understand how the reasoning works and that the processes are much more complex than Socrates perceived, especially the interaction between subconscious 'short-cutting' and conscious reasoning.

The Socratic thymos has been rediscovered of late. Socrates used the word *thymos* to describe man's need to be recognized and to protect his self-esteem. He perceived thymos as a virtue held by guardians who were prepared to defend their city with great courage and anger; he later described it as an innate sense of justice. The guardians were proud, but it was more than a personal feeling; they felt pride in the city and in the common interest. But thymos could, Socrates recognized, be a threat to a community; it had to be tamed.

Thymos has been perceived as a negative human feature by many later philosophers. The Enlightenment philosophers saw thymos in its untamed form, the ‘megalothymia’ of passionate, proud and stubborn princes, or of militant priests as the chief cause of wars. Liberal philosophers therefore strived to suppress thymos as a driver of man, replacing fulfilment of thymos with the fulfilment of desires.

Objections have been raised. The philosopher Georg W F Hegel, for example, strongly criticized this suppression of thymos; it is solely by risking his life that man can be a full man, he claimed.

Contemporary research sheds new light on this old debate. Socrates has been proven right in his assumption that thymos is a central human feature, but also in his perception that it can be tamed; the way to tame it is through the internalization of values. The internalized values define the self-image in relation to which thymos is measured and they steer the subconscious evaluation processes. The self-image is at the heart of *the struggle for recognition and the self-esteem (thymos)*, as it is the self-image that we want to protect and strengthen.

Hegel was right in his criticism of the liberal suppression of ‘thymos’, but wrong when claiming that the willingness to sacrifice one’s life was what made man man. The latter is a value-based assumption and values are acquired. That Europeans and Americans have different views on conflict-solving may thus be linked to the fact that the thymos seems to be “tamed” in different ways in the Anglo-Saxon and the continental European cultures.

The thymos is continuously exposed when man is acting on the market, as an employee or employer, as an entrepreneur or a trader. The market is a place where every day he gets feedback that affects the self-esteem and where he gets recognition by others. It is also a space in which a man’s thymos can thrive, especially if he has internalized values that highlight the fulfilment of material desires as a sign of success. Thymos seems, however, for most people

(those that are not obsessed with megalothymia, i.e. a wish to dominate at any cost) to demand satisfaction, not maximization. The need to get recognition and to protect the self-esteem also includes the family and the communities with which the individual identifies himself. How the family concept is defined and how large the communities are is obviously affected by the culture in which the individual is brought up.

### *The powerful self-justification process*

That we can hold different values consciously and subconsciously often put us in situations of cognitive dissonance, i.e. in a situation in which we can 'feel' that something is in a certain way, while consciously knowing that it is another way. We may be afraid of flying, while 'knowing' that it is less dangerous than driving a car. We may crave to light a cigarette, while knowing that the 'good feeling' has no support in science. Another anecdotal example: It is a well-known fact among market surveyors that they cannot trust the answers people give about their values. A broad majority in western economies answers that they are prepared to pay more for organic food and would chose that alternative if offered to them. But when people are shopping they act on 'auto-pilot' and most pick the cheapest alternative. They are steered by their subconsciously held values that differ from their conscious values. When people are asked why they have chosen the cheaper alternative a self-justification process helps them to invent an excuse to explain away the dissonance.

The findings that we humans are *inconsistent*, that we have a reasoning conscious self that can reach other conclusions than an on-line reasoning subconscious self is something that may be difficult to accept, particularly for us who are brought up in a Western culture. Consistency is a value that is held both consciously and subconsciously and when deciding, either through conscious reasoning or through on-line reasoning, we strive for consistency. That we in practice often take quite different decisions when acting on 'auto-pilot' than when reflecting is something we do not want to know as it threatens our self-image. Luckily for us we have the powerful self-justification process that ensures that we are kept in ignorance about our own inconsistency.

When the conscious and subconscious selves reach different conclusions (which they do every so often, on whether it is dangerous to fly for example) a complicated self-justification process sets in to protect thymos. *The self-justification process both protects and cheats*. The process is as much about protecting thymos and the self-esteem as it is about aligning the subconscious with the conscious self. It protects not only the self-esteem of the individual but also the esteem of the groups ("stereotypes") with which he identifies himself. But it also cheats the conscious self. The researchers have shown the strength of the self-justification processes; in concrete situations the self-justification processes may end up blocking the conscious beliefs, initiating self-justification processes that "rationalize" its decisions, and making the conscious self believe it has taken a reasoned view. The reasoning part of the brain may even be shut down during such a self-justification process. When we are asked why we have done something without 'thinking' we have to 'invent' a justification as the

subconscious self has no memory of the reason why it holds a certain belief. In this process the subconscious self can help by falsifying memories. There are some famous examples where people in their memoirs have turned originally embarrassing situations upside down and put themselves in the quite opposite position to the one they actually took at the time.

The social psychologists Carole Tarvis and Elliot Aronson have shown in their research how consensus cultures can develop in a group to protect the collective thymos and create unwillingness from a group to face new facts and to reason logically. They have shown how concerned psychologists as a group refused to face the fact that their therapeutic methods may have induced false memories in the children, when they questioned them about incest; many prosecutors and judges as a group have in a similar way rejected new DNA evidences that have shown that they have convicted the wrong person by coercing false confessions. The Founding fathers of the US Constitution had an intuitive understanding of this effect and therefore tried to build in a number of checks and balances in the governance in order to avoid such consensus cultures to develop.

The self-justification process can be affected by subconscious responses to intimidation and authority. The aim of *intimidation* is to make the target take decisions that are not based on sound reasoning. The self-justification process helps the unfortunate to get out of the situation with his thymos intact. The process may make him believe that he has actually taken an independent and rational stance while he in reality has been pressed to give in.

An area in which important research is still ongoing is the effect moods have on how the mind works. Whether a person is in *fear* or in a happy mood clearly affects his reasoning. The mood creates a form of bias. The research of the psychologist Drew Westen indicates that a subconscious self in fear can initiate decisions based on faulty premises such as subconscious prejudices, before the reasoning conscious self is alerted. The process under which people in Europe and the US have given up much of their privacy during the recent ‘reign of fear’ is an example. The risk with a state that has full and unrestricted surveillance of its citizens is of course that such a power can be abused. Most people realize the danger when reflecting rationally about the issue. At the same time the perceived increased security makes them “feel good” and less afraid.

Contemporary research has also shown how people can be subtly *manipulated*. The knowledge gained around mechanisms such as anchoring and priming or the exploiting of group conformity and psychological reactance are not lost on politicians who want to win elections or companies who want to sell products or services. This increased understanding of how to manipulate people is a challenge to democracy, especially as the knowledge gap between an informed elite and a less informed population seems to be increasing in many countries. The risk that the research results will be used to benefit the interests of the privileged few by manipulation of the ordinary citizens is obvious. Tendencies in that direction are noticeable, especially in countries where media are owned by individuals with political ambitions. This leads to another conclusion: *Democracy is a vulnerable system*. Democracy is on the surface placing few demands on the citizen; he is not expected to make decisions every minute of the day. Democracy is not primarily aimed at fulfilling individual

desires; it is supposed to be a value-based system that recognizes the equal value of man and ideally leads to collective rational solutions to collective issues. Once in a while people have to take a stance, vote in an election or take part in a referendum. It may seem that they are given ample time to make the choices, all the time they may need to reason deductively and reach considered decisions.

Democracy is in reality, however, not such a simple proposition as it may seem given the nature of man. In order to thrive, democracy needs an environment that supports the development and maintenance of shared values and a rational reasoning based on shared knowledge; such conditions are difficult to create in modern media societies and given the nature of man. Political attitudes and values are internalized together with other values early in life and they create what is sometimes called symbolic preconditions. Those preconditions can form a confirmation bias that blocks rational reasoning, especially if the voters are subject to intimidation or manipulation. With restricted or “blocked” knowledge the “power” of an individual’s conscious self over the subconscious diminishes. The idea of reasoned beliefs that is central to democracy thus demands a media environment reasonably free from intimidation and manipulation and it demands active efforts to spread and share un-biased knowledge and values.

The market economy is not as demanding. When people are acting in their civil life and within the market economy they are mainly trying to meet their desires. The drivers in people’s daily life are first of all to meet the need for survival and for reproductive success. Many basic desires are part of a genetic inheritance, but they are expanded through experiencing and by valuing. The market economy is generally accepted to be the best system ever created to meet those desires, but it is also a bottom-up system that demands that people are making decisions swiftly and on a vast scale. The on-line processing capacity of the subconscious self that helps people cope with that challenge at the same time limits the role of logical reasoning in the process. Reasoning is most likely at work when people look at contracts and negotiate prices, but the market economy as a system does not demand people to reason logically. The system works because man can act within it with subconsciously held motives that may be obscure even to him as long as he follows some simple rules. It is also a place in which man can prove himself, be recognized and build up his self-esteem. The market economy would most likely work better if everybody was well-informed and acting rationally all the time, but as every man is his own master it is not something the system demands of him. *The market economy is thus less vulnerable than democracy as the system responds also to subconscious features, such as thymos.*

One additional finding is worth mentioning: Both traditional economists and economists of the modern complexity school are highlighting people's *preferences* as the "mediating" element between the supply and the demand side in the economy. The creating of preferences is in this presentation seen as a result of the valuation process, which is such a central part of the mostly subconscious processes. Eric Beinhocker, one of the new school economists, notes that preferences are tricky, more of a logical construct than an empirical law. They are mostly,

he observes, only possibly to identify post facto.<sup>125</sup> The reasons are, as is explained by modern research, that the preferences are not only person but also context sensitive. To what degree we desire one product or service is decided on the spot by the relative involvement of subconscious desires and values in relation to conscious beliefs.

Market economy and democracy rely upon and respond to partly different features of human nature and have different justifications from a human nature point of view.

## 12. THE DEATH OF THE MYTH

The Standard Picture stated: “According to this picture, to be rational is to reason in accordance with principles of reasoning that are based on rules of logic, probability theory and so forth. If the standard picture of reasoning is right, principles of reasoning that are based on such rules are normative principles of reasoning, namely they are principles we ought to reason in accordance with”<sup>126</sup>

It is quite obvious that the way the brain works does not meet the Standard Picture demands whenever decisions are taken subconsciously or when subconscious processes are involved. The subconscious processes are cognition processes but not reasoning processes in the way the Standard Picture expects of a rational process. But let me for the sake of the argument first address the more “generous” interpretation of rationality that I already have quoted and that is offered by the Rational Choice proponent Michael Allingham: “My choice is rational, or supported by reason, if it coheres with what I prefer”. This interpretation does not demand that the choice has been subject to a deliberation as proposed by the Standard Picture and Aristotle. It only demands that the choice effectively coheres with the preferences of the subject, his goals and objectives. It allows for a decision without deliberations, taken on ‘auto-pilot’, to be rational as long as it meets the goals or objectives of the subject.

However, even with this “wide” interpretation of rationality the idea of the Rational Man runs into deep problems, when evaluated in relation to what we know today about human nature. The issue is that desires that are held subconsciously can differ from the reasoned objectives and goals that we hold consciously. It is not that they have to differ, but they do not have to be consistent. Subconscious desires are often more “egoistic”, less altruistic. This is among other things a consequence of how subconscious processes work and the difficulties to internalize values such as the equality of man. We all have desires that are not supported by conscious reasoning. The wish to be recognized by others may for example lead to a desire to buy a product of a high-end brand although it is more expensive and of no better quality than the

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<sup>125</sup> Beinhocker, 2006, p 319

<sup>126</sup> Stein, 1996, p 4

alternative. We may desire a car with higher performance capabilities than we actually need. We may love a person for all the wrong reasons, or more correctly against all conscious reasoning.

The fact that there is an inconsistency between conscious goals and objectives on one hand and subconscious desires on the other is obviously problematic. Which are the “rational” preferences? In the case of conflict it seems logical to give priority to consciously held objectives and regard conflicting subconscious desires as “irrational”. Anything else would be to let the concept of rationality lose all meaning, or would it? Max Weber once discussed the meaning of rationality in a way that still creates debate<sup>127</sup>. He has for example recently been accused of having an anti-feminist view on rationality<sup>128</sup>. Weber sees four forms of rationality.

In the first form, *Zweckrational*, the actions are based on rational expectations about human beings and objects in order to attain ends; in the other form, *Wertrational*, the actions are value and belief based. The third is described as affectual, determined by an actor’s specific affect, feelings or emotions and the fourth as traditional, determined by ingrained habituation. Weber is in his description of the last two forms close to a contemporary view on how subconscious processes work. But did he see the two last forms as really rational? It is not absolutely clear. He perceives the third type as being on the border of what he considered “meaningful oriented” and he saw the two latter forms as complementary to the two first, not as isolated types. At the same time he accepted a rationality that is not based on reason but on for example religious convictions.

However, the objection to the Rational Man idea remains even with this somewhat questionable expansion of the concept rationality. The key critique is that conscious and subconscious objectives and desires are inconsistent and that the “rationality” of an action can vary not just in a person-perspective but also with the context. When we act without conscious reasoning and on the basis of subconscious processes the inference is that we may act in conflict with our conscious objectives, a fact that undermines the idea of the Rational Man.

This conclusion that man cannot be seen as always rational, even in the restricted sense of the concept as defined by the Rational Choice theorist Allingham, is important. The serious question is if man is rational at all, if he is capable of living up to the standards set by the deontologists, even when reasoning consciously. The issue is whether he has the *competence*

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<sup>127</sup> Lash, Whimster, 1987

<sup>128</sup> Eagleton (ed) , 2003

and the answer to that question is neither straightforward. The ability to reason is something with which we are born, but how to do it correctly is something we are trained to do; that is after all what schools are about. The competence level varies of course between individuals due both to genetic conditions and the training or lack thereof. Experiments show that the competence with which we respond to a challenge depends also on the circumstances in which we answer. We can be distracted, deliberately manipulated, feel our self-esteem to be under threat etc. In most non-theoretical situations subconscious processes are also involved which may or may not contribute to a rational decision. There is nothing absolute about our competence to reason rationally; it is a person and context sensitive ability.

We need to take a step back, to start the analysis from where the nineteenth century philosophers left it and put a bracket on the twentieth century illusion of The Rational Man.