Rationality and indifference

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The columns of the previous two weeks stated that people are less rational than we think. In about 1340, the late-medieval scientist Buridanos showed that strict rationality would lead to inertia and death: a hungry, fully rational donkey standing exactly between two bales of hay, could not choose rationally and would therefore die.

Making a choice requires indifference, just doing something. Patients with damage in certain parts of the prefrontal cortex resemble Buridan's Donkey, as this statement has been called. Both emotion, and free will to act are missing, while rationality is intact. Emotion seems to be the fuel for action, much more needed for survival than rationality, which, as we have seen, is also extremely fallible (attribution errorand we also see causality where it is not). We cannot think in terms of systems, while practically everything around us does not consist of linear chains, but of complex dynamic systems.

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If something goes wrong, for example, someone must be responsible for it and we blame someone or a group: the politicians. In the case of success, no matter how arbitrary, we "blame" it on someone's genius. With our simple cause and effect thinking we can hardly understand rationality that there are many factors involved and that coincidence always has the final say.

Take a look at LinkedIn or Facebook: messages with an enormous amount of likes ("memes") almost always feed on unilinear thinking. But unfortunately, reality is systematic: relationships between elements may be (curvi-) linearly related within certain limit values, but show complexity outside, for example, phase transitions. Something that seems good locally can be bad globally and vice versa. Because of the human-technology symbiosis, our world is organized so complexly on such a large scale that linear rational thinking has become completely inadequate.

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