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## EVOLUTION, NOOSPHERE AND THE IDEA OF HAPPINESS

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*«Life is not a show or a party; is a condition»*

*George Santayana*

*«We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars»*

*Oscar Wilde*

*“Every truth passes through three stages before it is recognized. In the first, it is ridiculed. In the second, it is opposed. In the third, it is regarded as self-evident.”*

*Arthur Schopenhauer*

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As far as we know we are the only and exclusive species that has developed such a unique intelligence and has managed to occupy virtually the entire planet and build a civilization capable of observing the infinitely large and the infinitely small.

Nevertheless, for millions of years we were just irrelevant animals, and on the evolutionary scale, we have only very recently reached the top of the food chain, because for a long time, we have been more prey than predator. How did we pass from one of several human<sup>1</sup> species to occupy the place as a dominant species and worry about ideas like happiness?

What happened that gave us such a special ability to reflect on our past, think about the future and, more than that, cooperate and live in communities of groups of so great size that range from tens and hundreds of thousands to hundreds of millions without even knowing each other?<sup>2</sup>

It is true that we know other social species (wolves, elephants, dolphins, chimpanzees) that although relatively flexible, they can only cooperate in small restricted groups, and this cooperation also requires proximity processes and individual and intimate knowledge. If the group reaches a large scale, they can no longer cooperate. We, therefore, conclude that we are the only species capable of combining the two variables (flexibility and dimension), dispensing the other's intimate knowledge to cooperate. It is enough that

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<sup>1</sup> Among about 20 known to date, revealed by archaeology and Paleoanthropology.

<sup>2</sup> Probably, as they advocate several evolutionary scientists who advocate multilevel selection theory, it makes sense that evolution does not only occur at the individual level of genes, but also at the level of groups and those who manage to cooperate more efficiently and sufficiently flexible. In other words, it does not matter to make any kind of comparison at the individual level between a human being and any other animal, even if it is primate and genetically close to us. The difference in the performance and capacities of humans versus the other animals is at another level, that is, it results from the comparison between groups. Wilson, D. (2015). Does Altruism Exist? Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of others. N. Haven: Yale Press.

individuals possess and feel any bond or bond of belonging to the group, no matter their scale or dimension.

That's how we managed to do the best and the worst of what we're capable of. From wars to the construction of extermination camps, to the production of bombs, drones and missiles, to genocides, to the construction of cathedrals and castles, bridges, tunnels, dams, cities, automobiles, airplanes, computers, exploring the depths of the oceans and Space, stepping on the moon, launching probes and satellites and building even a permanent space station, among many others made besides considering that happiness is a goal of human beings.<sup>3</sup>

How do we do that? The answer seems to be, because we can simply invent ideas, narratives, stories and other fictions and, above all, believe in them. Human beings, in addition to the objective physical sphere of the environment in which they live, have managed to create another 'sphere of ideas' which corresponds to 'another reality', above the 'objective reality'. This is called the 'noosphere'!<sup>4</sup>

At the core of this is our ability not only to imagine, invent and tell stories and fictions, how to believe in them and, more importantly, be able to influence others enough to make them believe as well. Human beings can imagine and invent fictions as, more importantly, they are able to believe in their own fictions and lead others to do the same!

It is a fact that human beings can believe and maintain an indestructible belief or faith on any subject or issue, regardless of how stupid or absurd it is, if it is defended and sustained by a community of other individuals who think alike and believe in the same propositions.

The human ability to 'believe', and all 'mental mechanics' involved in the process, results from an adaptive instinct and our cognitive evolution, which is unique to our species. By trusting anything just 'because it believes', the individual fixes a belief, and in doing so, from the standpoint of 'rational choice', avoids the state of doubt or uncertainty and reduces complexity. We can thus speak, with property, in a 'biology of belief or fiction'. And this includes belief in happiness.

Therefore, in addition to the flexible and large-scale operating capacity, we have also managed to create and invent stories and ideas, and from them, to establish beliefs that have been having a remarkable effect on our cultural evolution. This happened because, together with the fictions and invented beliefs, we created 'decontextualization' mechanisms that were borne by 'symbolic guarantees' capable of acting in a time and space beyond the immediate and the present.<sup>5</sup>

Let's look at the example of one of the greatest and best representation of a collective symbolic guarantee: the money! In addition to being a means of exchange, like so many other ideas, money only works if individuals believe in it, because, intrinsically, whether on paper, in metal or in encrypted bits in computers, the money means absolutely nothing if we do not believe in it. It was the "symbolic guarantee" in which we believed collectively that the same became fundamental to the decontextualization of modern economic activity.

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<sup>3</sup> And all this was achieved in groups of hem scale, in which most of the times individuals had not (nor have) a practical and personal knowledge of each other. As we know, none of this is possible for the other species, no matter the degree of their pro-sociality.

<sup>4</sup> Noosphere is a term created by the physicist and mathematician Russian Vladimir Vernadski and disclosed by the philosopher Teilhard of Chardin in his work *Le Phénomène Humain*. Designates the world of ideas, spirits, gods, entities produced and nourished by human spirits within their culture. These fictional entities depend on the spirits and culture that feed them and acquire autonomy and life of their own and thus a dominating power over the human beings themselves, their creators.

<sup>5</sup> About the 'symbolic guarantees' see the work of A. Giddens *On Modernity and Modernity* (1991).

We invented (and continue to invent) fictions, in the expectation that others believe in them. But in the end, what we do and create are no more than « fulfilling prophecies ».<sup>6</sup>

Money is probably the biggest “collective fiction” that even today has the biggest success. Greater even than the fiction of God or happiness.

About the specific idea of happiness, from an evolutionary point of view, it is an emotion and a feeling that was incorporated in our evolution as something that we can only achieve as a briefly condition, something transitional. It disappears quickly because only this way, we will stay motivated to keep looking for it.

This is a good evidence of how natural selection does not concern the slightest about our idea of happiness, or about the success of individuals or with their states of soul. If that happened, we would always be in a state of permanent ecstasy as soon as we reached the state of happiness.

In conclusion, our species dominates the world, basically because it managed to create and live in a reality, or sphere, duplicated (the noosphere), while the other species can only live in a physical and unique reality, which is their environment, but without imagination, no stories, narratives or fictions in which to believe, or to get others to believe as well.

We have, therefore, created another ' level ' of reality, not reducible to the constituent elements. Just as the sphere of physical reality is something more than the fundamental mathematical and physical elements that make it up, and the sphere of biological life is something more than the sum of its physical and chemical elements, the sphere of social and psychological life, that means of our lives, has also become ' something else ': it has become a new ' level of reality '. And what is incredible (possibly shocking even) is that, currently, the reality of this noosphere, has become the most influential and dominant force that controls the world and our own lives, because it feeds from us!

After all, isn't it true that people fight and die for ideas?

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<sup>6</sup> Sociological proposition coined by William Thomas, though popularized by Robert Merton. A fulfilling prophecy predicts that when defining a situation as real, the situation tends to become real in its consequences. For example, the belief that a bank is going bankrupt can precipitate all depositors to raise their money at the same time which, therefore, will lead the bank inevitably... to bankruptcy.