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Emotions, Social Policies and Public Responsibilities: a Contribution to Social Innovation

Introduction

Current theory of democracy, which is founded on the work of classic authors like Hobbes (Hobbes 1651, Gauthier 1969) and contemporary authors like Rawls (1971), assumes that the basis of political authority remains in rational and informed contact with individuals. Similarly, the theory of rational choice developed in the mid-1900s by Morgenstern and Von Neumann, offers the model of rationality which has had the greatest success in economic sciences and in terms of conceiving the behaviour of individuals (Morgenstern, Von Neumann 1944, Downs 1957). An individual's preferences are considered rational if they are complete and transitive. If we also assume that choices are the direct result of preferences, choices deriving from complete and transitive preferences must also be rational (Kreps 1988). The *homo oeconomicus* is perfectly rational, a calculator with an infinite capacity that is able to process the information at his disposal so as to obtain the maximum level of utility.

Nevertheless, making the assumption that human beings always fulfil these characteristics is not trivial: a complete optimisation of the means for reaching the objectives that have been set requires an infinite mind, and calculation capacities which people simply do not have. Moreover, the completeness excludes indecisiveness, which is a natural phenomenon when alternatives are difficult to compare or information is scarce, not to mention cases where it is not easy to clearly define the transitive nature of preferences. The first scholar to focus on this aspect was the psychologist Simon (1955, 1982, 1985), whose studies on the actual calculation capacity of individuals, led to him considering human beings to be of "bounded rationality". This idea prompted much research. In particular, the experimental approach to social and economic sciences, whose founders include psychologists Tversky and Kahneman, allows us to critically appraise the idealizations of the *mainstream* decision making theory (Motterlini, Guala 2005). According to numerous studies carried

out by Tversky and Kahneman, (Tversky, Kahneman 1974, 2000; Kahneman 2002, 2011), human beings have a bounded rationality and often employ heuristics: mental short-cuts which permit a quick and relatively effortless response from a cognitive perspective, but which do not respect the rules of logic. As contended by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), innovative instruments, like cognitive nudges, can act on this cognitive system: these are environmental elements that can be designed and which use the impulsive system of the human brain to encourage certain decisions to be made instead of others. In this way, decision-makers, can make use of innovative policy instruments of a cognitive nature and are not therefore limited to traditional rational incentives.

A new interest on the psychological and emotional aspect of individuals is taking place even from a statistical and national income accounting perspective: in recent years, the literature on happiness has witnessed growing scientific contributions from the fields of economics, sociology and psychology (Frey, Stutzer 2006; Bruni, Porta 2004; Layard 2005; Gilbert 2006; Becchetti 2009; Bok 2010). In particular, psychological sciences enable the integration of statistical indicators with different models for the measurement of wellbeing that have been termed "subjective happiness" and "objective happiness" by their inventors (Easterlin 1974, 2001; Kahneman 1999, 2011). Improving the available data on collective wellbeing could allow decision-makers to develop public policies that respond increasingly well to people's actual requirements.

However, new cognitive and experimental paradigms lead to important questions regarding the ethical and political responsibility of public decision-makers (Giacomini 2012; 2016a; Rebonato 2012; Sunstein 2014). Is it right for a liberal and democratic regime to react to the inattention, unawareness and irrationality of its citizens by encouraging them to make the choices the institutions consider to be most appropriate? Is it desirable for public decision-makers to take the responsibility to use the irrationality and emotions of citizens to pursue specific objectives? Are public decision-makers able to use the instruments they have been provided with by the new cognitive and decision-making sciences? To what extent will they be willing to use these instruments in the development of innovative public policies? Finally, which method of measuring wellbeing should be used? It is possible that these questions on the responsibilities of the authorities, in terms of the emotional and irrational systems and make up individuals, will lead to a paradigm shift from the rationalistic Enlightenment ideal and rational assumptions of social, political and economic thought.

Cognitive nudges: innovative instruments for public policies

Actions taken by governments often have consequences for the behaviour of citizens. There are numerous political and economic policies that aim to promote the wellbeing of citizens by encouraging them to take specific decisions. The traditional instruments that are adopted include monetary incentives (Frey 1997). It is sufficient think of the taxation of tobacco and alcohol: by increasing duties on goods which have a high probability of causing severe damage to health, people are driven to limit their consumption. But an approach of this kind is not sufficient as it is not always suitable for human psychology and individuals' cognitive processes: in order to introduce positive practices for citizens it is possible to go beyond classic instruments such as economic incentives using human cognitive processes that are characterised by impulsiveness and irrationality (Deci, Ryan 1985; Motterlini, Guala 2005; Motterlini, Canova, Giacomini 2012; Giacomini 2013b).

According to Thaler and Sunstein (2008), innovative instruments like cognitive nudges can act on the emotional and irrational cognitive system: environmental elements that can be planned and that utilise the impulsive system of the human brain to encourage one decision over another. Even the smallest allusion to an idea or concept can trigger an association that stimulates action; in this way small psychological factors can exercise a not insignificant action on people's behaviour. Inertia, the way in which an option is represented, the choice of an affiliation group, are elements that influence people's actions in an emotional, impulsive, irrational way. There are numerous nudges that one can have recourse to (Dolan *et al.* 2009). One of the biggest nudges, for example, utilises the strength of default options. When a range of choices is offered, the default option is the one that is considered predefined and automatic until the moment a contrary instruction is put forward. Individuals do not have infinite calculation abilities and tend towards the status quo, which is not to modify the default options that have been presented to them. Particularly promising seems the use of social nudges: people are psychologically influenced by what others do, so it is possible to encourage them to enforce a behaviour simply by informing them of the fact that the majority has already adopted it.

For example, studies show that raising the taxation on substances dangerous for the health such as tobacco or alcohol with the aim of discouraging their consumption does not always achieve the desired outcome due to the chemical and psychological (non-rational) addiction associated with the prolonged use of these substances (Becker *et al.* 1994). At the same time, there is an important type of cognitive nudge, the manipulation of social norms, that in this field seems to have interesting

applicative potentialities. People are influenced by their beliefs regarding what their peers do. For example, if an individual thinks that his peers generally drink a lot of alcohol, this will irrationally influence his behaviour encouraging him to drink alcohol. The problem of contemporary societies is that students overestimate the consumption of alcohol of their companions. It has been shown that, if the perception is corrected, young people reduce their consumption. The University of Arizona has committed itself to correct this perception communicating the real level of consumption among young people through the use of posters, flyers and oral messages. In this way the social pressure on drinking alcohol has been weakened. Not appealing to individuals' rational system but rather utilising irrational and impulsive mechanisms related to the psychology of peer pressure, in three years the University Campus has experienced a significant drop of alcohol abuse (Joannessen, Glider 2003; Moreira *et al.* 2009).

There are other situations where recourse to a monetary incentive mechanism is forbidden by law. For example, the possibility to buy and sell organs, or even allow monetary incentives for the donation of organs is illegal in all western countries, mainly for moral reasons. And yet demand for organs far exceeds supply. How is it possible to improve the situation? In this case it is worth considering another type of nudge: the default options (Thaler, Sunstein 2008). As far as the modalities with which individuals express their consent or aversion to the removal of organs is concerned, it is interesting to notice the difference recorded among the levels of consent of two very similar countries: Austria and Germany. Germany, which has adopted an explicit system of consent (the default option is non-donation), sees only 12 citizens out of 100 giving consent for their organs to be harvested after death. On the other hand, Austria has adopted the method of presumed consent (the default option is donation) and has very different results: 99% become donors, while only 1% express their being against organ donation. Extending the analysis to other nations, similar results have been reached. Denmark, Holland, Great Britain and Germany, who chose the method of explicit consent record levels of donation between the 4.25 and 27.5 per cent. Austria, Belgium, France, Poland, Portugal and Sweden, that chose the presumed consent, see levels of participation between the 85.9 and the 99.98 per cent (Johnson, Goldstein 2003). The analysis of the economists Alberto Abadie and Sebastien Gay indicate that usually cognitive manipulation that consists of passing from the explicit to the presumed consent raises the level of donation of a country of around the 16 per cent (Abadie, Gay 2006).

Politicians are more and more interested in the contribution that a cognitive and experimental prospective can offer to governmental matters. Cass Sunstein was appointed by Barack Obama as head of the Of-

fice of Information and Regulatory Affairs[1]. Even British Prime Minister David Cameron wagered on cognitive nudges: he set up a team of behavioural researchers that is working to develop this type of innovative instrument[2]. The Behavioural Insights Team conducted research on how to reduce problems of a fiscal nature by encouraging citizens to engage in virtuous behaviour by focusing on their emotional and impulsive nature (Behavioural Insights Team 2012a, 2012b). For example, the team wanted to test whether sending a text message to citizens who had not paid fines within the required timeframes would encourage them to pay. The objective was that of avoiding even higher fines and sending out bailiffs to collect the payments. The experiment involved randomly assigning the individuals to five different groups. The control group were not sent any text messages. The other groups were sent standard messages and personalised messages (e.g. the letter would include the name and surname of the recipient). The results showed that a message can be very efficient. While only 5% of the control group paid, 23% of the individuals the received a standard message paid the sum they owed. But that is not the surprise: the response rate of the people that received a personalised message, in which the name of the recipient was stated, rose to 33%. It is clear that a simple cognitive nudge, such as the emotions connected to a sense of duty (and guilt) of seeing their own name written down, can be more effective than the traditional additional fines. It has been calculated that, if extended nationwide, this innovative practice could significantly improve the collection of fines. By simply sending a personal message instead of a standard one, more than £3 million could be saved every year by dispensing with the need to use bailiffs on 150,000 occasions.

As we have seen, the cognitive method can be applied in a policy context. For this reason it is desirable to assess the effectiveness of the cognitive nudge compared to more traditional instruments like monetary incentives. There are cases where classical monetary incentives are effective when people think in a rational manner. In other cases, where individuals' emotions and impulsiveness prevail, monetary incentives fail (Gneezy, Rustichini 2000) and cognitive nudges appear to be effective on people's behaviour. Nevertheless, important questions still have to be asked on the ethical/political legitimacy of these innovative instruments and the public responsibilities of those developing them. Is it right for a liberal

[1] Wallace-Wells B., "Cass Sunstein Wants to Nudge Us", The New York Times, May 13, 2010: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/magazine/16Sunstein-t.html

[2] Wintour P., "David Cameron's 'nudge unit' aims to improve economic behaviour", The Guardian, September 9, 2010: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/sep/09/cameron-nudge-unit-economic-behaviour; The Behavioural Insights Team Website: http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/inside-the-nudge-unit/

and democratic regime to react to the inattention, unawareness and irrationality of its citizens by encouraging them towards the directions the institutions consider best? It is desirable for public decision-makers to take the responsibility of using citizens' irrationality and emotions to pursue specific objectives? Are public decision-makers actually able to use the instruments provided by new cognitive and decision-making sciences?

The measurement of happiness: new goals for public decision-makers

In recent years the literature on happiness has seen an increase in scientific contributions from the fields of economics, sociology and psychology. Seeing wellbeing as being made up of psychological factors, as well as economic/material factors, has been seen as desirable for some time: the objective is that of innovating the perception of national income accounting which is currently principally based on gross domestic product (Bruni, Porta 2004; Frey, Stutzer 2006; Layard 2005; Ng, Ho 2006; Gilbert 2006; Becchetti 2009; Bok 2010). As underlined in the summer of 2012 by the president of the Federal Reserve Bernanke, during the course of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, "measurements of wellbeing are an important pursuit" for the development of contemporary societies because "that which we decide to measure, or which we can measure, has an important effect upon what we do, and it is quite normal to concentrate on objectives for which we can more successfully estimate and document the effects of our decisions"[3].

Back in 2008, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy set up a commission coordinated by two Nobel prize-winners, Stiglitz and Sen, and the French economist Fitoussi, in order to assess the nation's human and social progress[4]. Three years later the British Prime Minister Cameron also took affirmative action by launching an innovative "census of happiness"[5]. An additional point of reference at an international level is certainly the World Happiness Report, coordinated by researchers of the standing of John Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs[6]. This con-

[3] Bernanke B., Speech at the 32nd General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 06, 2012: https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/bernanke20120806a.htm

[4] Stiglitz J, Sen A., Fitousssi J.P., "Report of the commission on the measurement of economic performance et social progress", 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/118025/118123/Fitoussi+Commission+report

[5] Stratton A., "David Cameron aims to make happiness the new GDP", The Guardian, November 14, 2010: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/nov/14/david-cameron-wellbeing-inquiry

[6] The World Happiness Report Website: http://worldhappiness.report/

tains various aggregations of indicators which referred to whole series of dimensions that contribute to measuring the quality of life as declared by people. Even in Italy, for some years Istat has been carrying out an investigation (Bes – Benessere equo e sostenibile) that contains also indicators on psychological wellbeing[7].

A psychological approach to the issue of the measurement of a population's happiness has, in recent decades, produced two main indicators of social wellbeing, which their inventors have termed "subjective happiness" and "objective happiness" (Kahneman 1999, Kahneman *et. al.* 2004a, 2004b). The results offer interesting thoughts on contemporary society. As far back as 1974, based on measurements of subjective happiness in numerous nations, demographer Easterlin discovered the "income – happiness Paradox": while the wealth of developed societies continued to increase exponentially, its people did not become significantly happier (Easterlin 1974, 2001; Blanchflower, Oswald 1999). Additional information has been offered by the indicator of objective happiness. In a study carried out by Kahneman on a sample of 909 workers in Texas it emerged that the emotional state depends strongly on the activity one is involved in. The majority of the more pleasant daily activities take place outside of economic-productive context, e.g. having intimate relationships, spending time with one's family or friends, while the lowest index of appreciation was recorded for transfers between the home and the workplace itself (Kahneman *et al.* 2004a). But what is subjective and objective happiness? How were these results obtained?

Subjective happiness is based on hedonic self-perception. Individuals are normally given a questionnaire on the quality of life that contains questions such as: "Taking your life as a whole, how are things going? Do you consider yourself to be happy, quite happy or not very happy?" People are then given the task of declaring their own level of subjective happiness by comparing it to adjectives or using a numerical scale with the highest numerical quantity indicates the maximum happiness by the lowest quantity indicates the lowest level of happiness (Easterlin 1974, 2001). The method of subject happiness has a primary advantage: the ease of measurement means it can be used on a large number of individuals. The approach is subjective because it allows individuals to judge based upon what they consider to be important in terms of their happiness. An individual describes his/her life on the whole, independently summarising many aspects that comprise the dimension of happiness and wellbeing. Thus, individuals are free to include in the overall judgement

[7] The Bes – Benessere equo e sostenibile Website: http://www.istat.it/it/benessere-e-sostenibilit%C3%A0/misure-del-benessere

all the dimensions for wellbeing they considered to be relevant, starting from elementary pleasure through to the more profound and spiritual sense in which we can interpret happiness.

However it is right to ask whether individuals are capable of expressing reliable judgements on their own happiness and whether they are able to accurately report their own level of life satisfaction. For example, emotional states are highly variable and responses to questions can vary significantly even over short periods of time. According to Schwarz and Strack, the state of mind appears to be a very important factor in subjective happiness, that is sometimes more important than considerations on specific areas of people's lives such as work or married life (Schwarz, Strack 1999). Another problem relates to the reliability of the memory processes, which can be influenced by momentary manipulations of the state of mind or contextual elements such as the culture of references. For example, it is sufficient to ask the question "When was the last time you were seeing a girl?" before posing a question on the level of subjective happiness for everything to be framed in terms of emotional relations (Schwartz, Strack 1999). In addition every culture influences its members through peculiar ideas and rules: e.g. the French could be reluctant to express satisfaction with regard to their life to a stranger, while Americans, with their proverbial optimism, may tend to emphasise their own happiness (Kahneman, Riis 2005).

Nevertheless, these critical aspects are not sufficient to entirely reject the indicator of subjective happiness. When considered by a sufficiently sophisticated researcher some of these can be avoided or minimised. For example, although some research indicates that responses on subjective happiness are influenced by the weather, it has been shown that if the researcher asks the individuals about the weather, thus making them aware of their cognitive mechanisms, then the good or bad weather will not influence judgements on life satisfaction (Schwartz, Clore 1983). It should also be noted that changes in valuations caused by variations in mood in specific cases relate especially to single individuals, and did not produce serious consequences on the reliability of research based on a large number of interviews.

The second indicator of psychological wellbeing called "objective happiness" and invented by Daniel Kahneman and his team, consists in having individuals judge their own hedonic level with regard to specific recent episodes, before then processing this data statistically. The indicator of objective happiness is innovative because it aims to overcome, starting with the measurement itself, the problems created by questionnaires on overall satisfaction like the inaccuracies of heuristics, memory or cultural influences. In this way, according to the inventors of objective happiness, it is possible to obtain more accurate and reliable results (Kahneman

1999). However, the main risk is that these reports of happiness focus only on certain aspects of happiness, while neglecting others. By measuring happiness that is limited to specific moments that occurred recently, the risk could be that of producing a reductionist report. In addition, according to researcher Anna Alexandrova, by not considering retrospective and overall judgements individuals are encouraged not to consider ideas, values, memories and expectations that may be an integral part of hedonic experience (Alexandrova 2005).

The main method for measuring "objective happiness" has been called the Daily Reconstruction Method (Kahneman *et al.* 2004b). Subjects are asked to keep a diary of the events they experienced in the previous day and specify for each of these episode their state of mind. In particular, subjects are given a structured questionnaire comprising a detailed description of a specific day in the life of the interviewee. They are then asked to recall the memories connected to the previous day by writing short diary entries in the form of episodes. Finally, interviewees provide a detailed description of every episode specifying when it started and finished, what they were doing, where they were, the people they were interacting with and, obviously, the degree of hedonic involvement. The method is based on research that shows that accurate retrospective measurements can be obtained by encouraging the memory to focus on specific episodes that occurred recently (Robinson, Clore 2002).

The strength of this innovative method is its capacity to grasp the hedonic sentiment whilst minimising distortions due to heuristics, memory processes as well as cultural influences. We have already spoken about the possibility that measurements of subjective happiness are influenced by different cultural perspectives. In this regard the researcher Oishi established that students of Japanese origin reported levels of wellbeing which were inferior to those of American students in subjective and retrospective assessments, but they declared a similar level in experiments in which experiences were measured directly (Oishi 2002).

There are nevertheless some problematic aspects. There could be doubts about individuals' capacity to communicate their hedonic level at each moment. According to Kahneman there is proof of the fact that the human brain continually and naturally processes the events that are taking place in emotional terms (Kahneman 1999). This can be summarised in terms of approach and refusal: the dimension of positive/negative experience is nothing more than the propensity that individuals have to continue or conclude experience they are living. People being interviewed may hope the situation they are in continues or that it ends quickly, and the capacity to resolve this conflict implies the possibility of a common unit of measurement.

These considerations do not avoid the possibility that objective happiness grasps some aspects of happiness, while neglecting others. Positive and negative feelings can be broken down into different qualities of feelings: individuals can be angry, demotivated, upset, sad, offended, bored, or curious, happy, collaborative, balanced, calm. With regard to subjective happiness, we are easily inclined to think that an individual is free to consider all dimensions of wellbeing, including the most complex ones. But is it satisfactory to consider individuals to be "objectively happy" when they spend the majority of their time performing activities they would like to continue or which they would like to end? The risk might be that of producing a limited and reductionist picture. According to researcher Anna Alexandrova, not considering retrospective judgements is an arbitrary decision (Alexandrova 2005).

Finally, even in terms of the use of the psychological factor of wellbeing, there are questions of an ethical/political nature as well as questions relating to the responsibilities of decision-makers with regard to citizens. To what extent can public decision-makers be interested in using these indicators for the development of innovative public policies? Does the fact that a state measures the wellbeing of the population not risk being an interference in citizens' private lives? Finally: what method of measurement should we use? The subjective one, the objective one, or both? The choice of criteria with which to measure happiness is not neutral and implies taking on a public responsibility which could have significant ethical/political consequences. In fact, in planning the criteria with which to measure the wellbeing of the population it is inevitable that the public decision-maker will influence, at least in part, the results of the research itself.

This last issue appears evident thanks an experiment by Kahneman and the medical doctor Redelmeier. It considers the assessment of pain experienced during a colonoscopy (Redelmeier, Kahneman 1996; Redelmeier, Katz, Kahneman, 2003). During the experiment patients were asked to report the intensity of the pain on a numerical scale every minute: the average of the intensity, multiplied by the duration of the experience, should be a fairly reliable representation of the patient's experience. Another means of representation could be obtained by asking the patient to provide an overall judgement of the experience at the end of the procedure. The results obtained by Kahneman and Redelmeier show that there is a weak correlation between the two methods of measurement. For example, according to the minute by minute measurement, considering two experiences with a similar intensity of pain, the longer one is on the whole more painful than the one with a lesser duration. But sometimes this result is not confirmed by retrospective overall valuation: it can be, as a result of mechanisms of mental calculation called heuris-

tics, that a longer experience can be judged on the whole and retrospectively to be better than a shorter one. In fact, a judgement which is given on a minute by minute basis (objective happiness) summarises the entire experience, while a judgement that stems from memory (subjective happiness) is well correlated only at the moment of maximum pain intensity and at the final moment (heuristic end-peak): this experiment shows with experimental and empirical evidence that these two judgements do not always correspond.

Discussion: the ethical and political responsibility of public decision-makers

My thesis is that the consequences of the cognitive approach have significant effects on the theory of social, political and economic decision-making and therefore on the way we conceive ther responsibility public decision-makers hold towards citizens.

The Enlightenment view was considered free, universal, aware and emancipated from passion (Outram 2014). The idea that there can be views of the world which think in terms of frames, metaphors and heuristics, or that language and public policies could be used to activate specific behaviour was alien to it. Moreover the current theory of democracy, which is founded on the work of authors such as Hobbes (Hobbes 1651, Gauthier 1969) and Rawls (1971), is based on the notion that political authority is in rational and knowing contact with individuals. Similarly, the theory of rational choice has until now dominated the models of economic behaviour: the *homo economicus* is powerfully rational, a calculator of infinite capacity able to process the information at its disposal in order to always obtain the maximum level of utility (Morgenstern, Von Neumann 1944; Savage 1954; Becker 1976). The two main questions which arise from a change of the traditional rational-Enlightenment perspective are the following. The first point relates especially to the use of irrationality by public decision-makers and the risk of paternalism. The second point intends to more generally assess the opportunity of the political use of instruments and indicators of wellbeing that cognitive science offers.

FIRST. If the responsibility of the public decision-maker was taken with regard to the irrationality and emotions of citizens, this may lead to an accusation of paternalism (Rebonato 2012). However, given the bounded rationality and emotional system of individuals, a certain level of paternalism in relations between the political authorities and citizenship, that we shall call "minimal paternalism", is, I believe, very hard to avoid (Sunstein 2014, Giacomini 2016). An unconditional freedom of choice is not realistic: however we project the environments of choice, their cognitive set-up interferes with individual decisions. On the other

hand in a liberal and democratic State the authorities' intervention must be limited and citizens must have the possibility to ignore the recommendations of the State. How can we reconcile the descriptive facts described by the cognitive sciences with the ethical and political responsibility of public decision-makers in a manner that is consistent with the values of freedom and pluralism?

A fundamental reflection on the relations between liberalism and paternalism dates back to John Stuart Mill (1859). Individual choices, as Mill writes, should not be the object of interference, neither on the part of individuals nor on the part of the authorities, except in cases where the interference aims to ward off damage to others (other-regarding actions). What about where self-regarding actions are concerned? Institutions can interfere only on one condition: when warding off self-inflicted damage occurring consequent to decisions which are not deliberated with the necessary awareness, so are not 'authentically' wanted. In these situations the authorities are legitimised to intervene to protect the individual, whether from cognitive limitation or incipience, from harming him/herself. Additional clarification is attributed to Gerald Dworkin (1983): he asserts that interference with freedom of action, justified as protection of wellbeing, can assume two separate forms, strong paternalism and weak paternalism. Strong paternalism holds that individuals, independent of the way in which they make their choices, are obliged to execute behaviour prescribed by the authorities. The outcome is illiberal. Weak paternalism, conversely, holds that people can be incentivised, pushed by institutions towards a determined behaviour the moment there is the risk their choice might not be fully considered. Weakly paternalistic actions must be persuasive but not coercive: to preserve freedom, the interference must be easily avoided, without serious consequences, by the individuals concerned. The outcome is compatible with a liberal and democratic regime (Giacomini 2013a).

I am of the opinion that, in adopting a cognitive perspective, Thaler and Sunstein (2008) offer additional contributions on the debate on paternalism. The empirical starting point is that individuals, in virtue of not being perfectly rational, are influenced in their choices by the way in which problems and situations are presented to them (Kahneman 2002, 2011). Let us take the case of organ donation: there is in fact no architecture of choices that is completely neutral. Every architecture incentivises one behaviour as opposed to another. Therefore, if according to libertarians "individuals should be free to act as they choose", according to Thaler Sunstain, unconditional and absolute freedom of choice is unrealistic (Thaler, Sunstein 2005, 2008). It is a fact, that however policies are designed, their set-up interferes with individuals' decisions. This is why the position of pure libertarianism is not sustainable. On the other

hand, in a liberal and democratic state, intervention must be limited and citizens must have the chance to follow their preferences.

An alternative that could be presented to libertarianism and paternalism, is libertarian paternalism (Thaler, Sunstein 2008, Sunstein 2014). Considering the cognitive fact according to which every environment influences, at least to some extent, a choice, public authorities intervene in order to improve wellbeing. But, at the same time, the intervention is weak enough to safeguard the freedom of choice and the pluralism of lifestyles (weak paternalism). The type of interventions that can be proposed is relatively feeble, indulgent and non-intrusive, because choices are not blocked, prevented or rendered too burdensome. It is always possible for an individual to express with sense of awareness his/her particular opinion and put it in practice. In order to safeguard freedom, intervention needs to be easily avoidable without individuals incurring excessive costs.

In conclusion, the studies of contemporary cognitive science appeared to suggest that in many areas a certain degree of paternalism (that we could call "minimal paternalism") is difficult to avoid because of the cognitive structure of human beings. In this way it is possible to rethink relations between freedom and coercion, and individual responsibility and authority, while remaining within the boundaries and respecting the characteristics of a liberal democracy (Giacomini 2016a).

SECOND. The second aspect which needs to be clarified relates to the issue of "epistemic democracy" (Cohen 1986). In fact, a cognitive approach to public policy suggests a return of social science as engineering, i.e. to a way of understanding relations between science and politics where science provides the theories which the applied scientist must then adapt to the concrete cases of politics. But this approach requires the existence of public authorities that are interested and able to make use of the recommendations of social engineering in making decisions.

It is the problem of planning, that was raised by Von Hayek in his work *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). The central question is: who plans for others? Who directs others? The question of planning does not simply consist in knowing whether it is possible to best to satisfy needs and aspirations. It consists in seeing whether individuals will decide what is best, or whether the planner will do this. It is therefore a system in which the will of a few people will decide who has what and a system in which this depends at least in part on the ability and initiative of the people concerned. It is certainly true, according to Von Hayek, that every government influences the lives of people and there is not even one aspect that cannot be influenced by the decisions of public authorities. Every political action is (or should be) a plan and there can be a difference only between good and bad, wise and deranged, prescient and short-sighted

plans. But there are different methods of intervention in different areas of responsibility for the institutions.

The debate on the implications of applying the measurement of happiness to issues of public policy is ongoing. From the perspective of the measurement of happiness, integrating an indicator such as Gross domestic product, as well as studying and recommending better conditions for the personal wellbeing of citizens, should not involve a pervading and totalizing degree of planning. There is also the problem of the choice of criteria and factors which should make up a new indicator: it is in fact impossible for the public decision-maker to take a neutral position. The very relationship between the two indicators of subjective and objective happiness appears to be in dialectical competition. In a way, the method proposed by Kahneman (1999) appears to stem from an atomistic and reductionist approach: the various descriptions of happiness see moments as elementary units and the made up on the basis of universal laws and logical rules. Instead, subjective happiness appears closer to a holistic approach, from which the sum of the moments gives rise to a characteristics of emerging happiness. Thus, the different methods measure happiness in different situations and may not be completely commensurable.

In addition, the fact that individual decision-makers are only partially rational does not correspond to the fact that the political and institutional decision-maker is characterised by absolute rationality: the political process is not populated by decision-makers who establish the aims of politics and then search for optimal means of reaching these objectives. Instead within political bargaining, different groups push in different directions, defending their own specific interests: the result, which reflects a mix of conflicting preferences and an unequal distribution of power, is not a rational summary. This is why there is a risk that the scientist could even be exploited: the most frequent use of applied research in policy is that of political ammunition, i.e. an instrument forgiving legitimacy to political decisions or opposing partisan interests (Panebianco 1989). Clearly scientific knowledge is not and cannot become the privileged guide of public and democratic decisions: there is no agreement in terms of the aims of the scientist and the politician with regard to what a desirable outcome should be. The real question at stake is not the consequence of the truth, but the relationship between freedom and power. This is why, within a democracy, science cannot have a privileged and decisive role in the management of the public affairs (Giacomini 2016b).

In conclusion, social, political and economic innovation that may arise from recent developments in cognitive sciences and the psychology of decision-making can be interesting in both the theoretical and practical context. Nevertheless it gives rise to a series of problems in terms of the

ethical and political responsibilities of public decision-makers that have only been briefly touched upon here, and which we believe require an in-depth examination by governments and the scientific community. It is in fact possible that it may be necessary to discuss and even change the classical rational-Enlightenment assumptions of social, political and economic thought: according to Enlightenment assumptions public decisions are guided by an aware and calculating approach that is able to put aside and overcome impulsive-irrational inclinations. Thus we should be heading towards a new post-Enlightenment model, where rationality and emotions are integrated in a relationship where rationality is seen as limited, opening new paths for the awareness of political consequences which the emotional nature of individuals requires.

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Emozioni, politiche sociali e responsabilità pubbliche: un contributo all'innovazione sociale

La nuova psicologia delle decisioni e le scienze della felicità mostrano che gli individui non sono soltanto razionali, come presuppongono in larga parte le scienze sociali classiche, ma presentano delle caratteristiche irrazionali ed emotive non trascurabili. Le scienze cognitive e sperimentali, quindi, offrono nuovi contributi per lo sviluppo di politiche pubbliche basate su una descrizione psicologica degli individui sempre meno astratta e sempre più realistica. Dai pungoli cognitivi ad una contabilità nazionale che tenga conto del benessere dei cittadini inteso nel senso più completo possibile, sono diversi gli strumenti innovativi a disposizione dei decisori pubblici. Tuttavia, questo paradigma cognitivo e sociale apre ad alcuni interrogativi di carattere etico/politico e normativo: è lecito e auspicabile che il decisore pubblico utilizzi l'irrazionalità e l'emotività dei cittadini per perseguire determinati obiettivi? I decisori pubblici sono in grado e sono interessati ad utilizzare gli strumenti messi a disposizione dalle nuove scienze cognitive e delle decisioni?

PAROLE CHIAVE: politiche pubbliche, paternalismo, democrazia liberale, felicità, razionalità limitata.

Emotions, Social Policies and Public Responsibilities: a Contribution to Social Innovation

The new psychology of decision-making and the sciences of happiness demonstrate that individuals are not merely rational, as is largely assumed in the classical social sciences: they also possess irrational and emotional characteristics which are not negligible. Therefore, cognitive and experimental sciences offer contributions for the development of innovative public policies based upon a psychological description of individuals that is now becoming less abstract and more realistic. From cognitive nudges to a national income accounting that takes into account the wellbeing of citizens in the most complete manner possible, there are a variety of innovative instruments at the disposal of public decision-makers. However, the cognitive and social paradigms present us with some questions regarding the ethical/political responsibilities of public decision-makers: is it right and desirable for public decision-makers to use the irrationality and emotions of citizens to pursue specific objectives? Are they indeed able to and interested in using the instruments they have been provided with by the new cognitive and decision-making sciences?

KEYWORDS: policies, paternalism, liberal democracy, happiness, bounded rationality.