

# S TUDI DI SOCIOLOGIA

2

Anno LV  
Aprile-Giugno 2017

Poste Italiane SpA spedizione in Abb. Postale D.L. 353/2003 (conv. in L. 27.02.2004 n° 46) art. 1, comma 1, DCB Mi

VP VITA E PENSIERO

# STUDI DI SOCIOLOGIA



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

**2** Anno LV  
Aprile-Giugno 2017

Pubblicazione trimestrale

Direttore  
V. CESAREO

Comitato di Direzione  
L. BOVONE, V. CESAREO, M. COLASANTO, G. GASPARINI

Comitato Scientifico  
S. ABBRUZZESE, S.S. ACQUAVIVA, M. AMBROSINI, N. AMMATURO, S. ANDRINI, B. AVANZINI, S. BELARDINELLI, L. BERZANO, E. BESOZZI, R. BICHI, A. BIXIO, L. BOCCACIN, G. BOCCIA ARTIERI, V.A. BOVA, L. BOVONE, M. BURGALASSI, C.C. CANTA, M. CASCAVILLA, B. CATTARINUSSI, C. CIPOLLA, R. CIPRIANI, V. CODELUPPI, M. COLASANTO, F. COLOMBO, I. COLOZZI, C. CORPOSANTO, C. CORRADI, L. D'ALESSANDRO, M. D'AMATO, R. DE MUCCI, G. DE RITA, R. DE VITA, G. DELLI ZOTTI, P. DI NICOLA, L. DIOTALLEVI, P. DONATI, A. FADDA, L. FAZZI, M.C. FEDERICI, F. FERRUCCI, F. FOLGHERAITER, F. FORNARI, L. FRUDÀ, F. GARELLI, A. GASPARINI, G. GASPARINI, G. GILI, L. GIULIANO, G. GRECO, R. GUBERT, C. LANZETTI, M. LA ROSA, A. LA SPINA, F. LAZZARI, F. LO VERDE, A. MACCARINI, M. MAGATTI, T. MARCI, S. MARTELLI, A. MAZZETTE, G. MAZZOLI, A. MERLER, E. MINARDI, A. MONGELLI, A. MONTANARI, E. MORA, G. MORO, G. MULÈ, M. NEGROTTI, M. NIERO, D. PACELLI, M. PALUMBO, C. PENNISI, G. PIERETTI, G. PIRZIO AMMASSARI, G. POLLINI, S. PORCU, R. PRANDINI, M. RAITERI, R.N.M. RAUTY, E. RECCHI, L. RIBOLZI, G. ROSSI, G. ROVATI, A. RUFINO, E.U. SAVONA, A. SCAGLIA, S. SCANAGATTA, D. SECONDULFO, G. SGRITTA, R. STRASSOLDO, A. TAROZZI, B. VALLI, L. ZANFRINI, P. ZURLA

International Board  
M. AHEDO, L. BALDASSAR, M. BARNES, D.F. BECHMANN, G. BURFORD, C. COSTATOPOLOU, P. FLICHY, S. GINER, J. HASSARD, D. HUGHES, E. KUHLMANN, C. LE GRAND, D. LIGHT, D. LINDSTROM, G. LIPOVETSKY, D. MECHANIC, K. MORRIS, D. O'BYRNE, R. PENNIX, C. RUMFORD †, G. SCAMBLER, M. VANDERPLAAT, A. ZINGERLE

Redazione  
M. MAGATTI (coordinatore), D. BRAMANTI, A. CASELLA, M. CASELLI, F. CIMAGALLI, M. COLOMBO, A. CUGNO, C. FONIO, F. INTROINI, G. IORIO, L. LODIGIANI, M. LOMBARDI, L. LOMBI, C. LUNGHI, F. MARCALETTI, O. MARCU, M. MARTINELLI, G. MASCHERONI, S. MAZZUCHELLI, S.G. MEDA, M. MONACI, I. PAIS, C. PASQUALINI, N. PAVESI, L. PESENTI, I. PICCOLI, M.L. RAINERI, M. SANTAGATI, S. TOMELLERI, A. VARGIU

Analisi d'opere  
L. PESENTI

Segreteria di redazione  
N. PAVESI (coordinatrice), C. FONIO, L. LOMBI, F. MARCALETTI, O. MARCU, G. MASCHERONI, S. MAZZUCHELLI, S.G. MEDA, C. PASQUALINI, M.L. RAINERI, M. SANTAGATI  
<studi.sociologia@unicatt.it>

Redazione Scientifica/Editor: mauro.magatti@unicatt.it  
Redazione Editoriale/Production Editor: redazione.vp@unicatt.it  
Abbonamenti/Subscription Queries: commerciale.vp@unicatt.it

Sul sito <http://studisociologia.vitaepensiero.it>  
Articoli full text, Nuove uscite e Archivio digitale  
Abbonamenti e Informazioni

**www.vitaepensiero.it**

Libri Ebook Riviste - Anteprime Notizie Interviste e Gallery

Anche su     

© 2017 Vita e Pensiero - Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Con il contributo CNR

Proprietario: Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo di Studi Superiori

È vietata la riproduzione degli articoli senza il preventivo consenso dell'Editore

La pubblicazione di articoli, note, analisi d'opere, ecc., non implica da parte della Direzione

e dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore adesione alle opinioni, alle notizie e ai dati esposti.

Corrispondenze, pubblicazioni e periodici devono essere indirizzati alla Direzione della Rivista

ISBN: 978-88-343-3390-7

ISSN (carta): 0039291X

ISSN (digitale): 18277896

Prezzo del presente fascicolo:

Privati - carta: per l'Italia € 24,00 - per l'Estero € 42,00

Enti - carta: per l'Italia € 26,00 - per l'Estero € 45,00

Abbonamento annuo:

Privati: - carta e online: per l'Italia € 78,00 - per l'Estero € 120,00

Enti: - carta e online: per l'Italia € 86,00 - per l'Estero € 132,00

Per accessi simultanei sopra i 15 utenti contattare via email l'ufficio commerciale.

Info e vantaggi per gli abbonati su [www.vitaepensiero.it/abbonamenti](http://www.vitaepensiero.it/abbonamenti)

Redazione e Amministrazione: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore - L.go Gemelli, 1 - 20123 Milano

Redazione: tel. 02/72342368 - mail: [redazione.vp@unicatt.it](mailto:redazione.vp@unicatt.it)

Amministrazione/Abbonamenti: tel. 02/72342310 - mail: [commerciale.vp@unicatt.it](mailto:commerciale.vp@unicatt.it)

Direttore responsabile: Carlo Balestrero

Registrazione del Tribunale di Milano 5 febbraio 1963, n. 6184

Copertina: Andrea Musso

Fotocomposizione: BA.MA., Trezzo sull'Adda (Mi)

Stampa: Litografia Solari, Peschiera Borromeo (Mi)

Finito di stampare nel mese di giugno 2017

Pubblicità inferiore al 45%

# Sommario

Special Issue on «Azioni e rischi sociali. Per una lettura sociologica della sicurezza e dell'insicurezza umane»  
a cura di Maria Caterina Federici e Uliano Conti

M.C. FEDERICI  
Introduzione. Azione umana e rischio sociale p. 129

## Saggi

F. D' ANDREA  
Being human. A few Remarks about Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* » 135

J.B. ASHFORD  
Security and maturity interactions: testing fragile distinctions  
in law and practice with micro-sociological propositions » 147

R. FEDERICI  
La domanda di sicurezza negli spazi urbani » 163

U. CONTI  
Eziologia della violenza. Un'analisi quantitativa visuale di DABIQ » 175

## Altri contributi

G. LA ROCCA  
*Social bullying*. Un'analisi delle recenti pratiche di diffusione  
degli atti di bullismo » 195

**Summaries** » 211

## SAGGI

BEING HUMAN. A FEW REMARKS ABOUT DESCARTES'  
*COGITO ERGO SUM*\*

«Try to understand that I'm / Trying to make a move just to stay in the game / I try to stay awake and remember my name / But everybody's changing / And I don't feel the same.» A few years ago, in 2004, a British band named Keane published their debut album, *Hopes and Fears*, instantly topping the UK charts. The album included a song about the growing difficulty of maintaining some kind of self-consistency, *Everybody's Changing*, from which come the opening lines of this essay, and was on the whole a fresco of contemporary anxiety and sense of displacement. Perhaps being so close to the *Zeitgeist* was one of the reasons for its international success, but even if this is not the case, those few lines sketch with poetic effectiveness an existential condition that is becoming more and more widespread with each passing year – one that marks the transition to another paradigm, however dim its contours are as yet.

At the root of this unease there is a growing chasm between what Western man is and what he thinks he should be that is undermining our culture's self-confidence and ability to understand the world and itself. This is not the only reason for the decline of Modern certainties, of course: it is only one thread in a much more complicated tapestry that contemporary men are doing their best collectively to ignore. It is nonetheless the hidden key that supports most of the structure, because it goes down deep into human awareness and moulds it into a unique pattern that is beginning to show its limits and distortions.

The discussion begins with Descartes and a few unnoticed consequences of his philosophical success, in particular his well-known maxim, *cogito ergo sum*. This assertion has strong ties with an all-time favourite question to which Western culture is paying scant attention, that is «how do I know that I am human?». Such an awkward feeling and uneasy answer. Descartes helped simplify the question, and his solution worked out pretty well for a while, but modernity's incessant rationalization transformed his simple solution into a Procrustean bed (Taleb 2010) from which there is no obvious escape: you are human if – and only if – you are constantly rational; yet

\* I would like to thank John Andrews for his help in the translation of this essay and for his precious support and feedback on this and other occasions.

this has no definite meaning as reason and its activity can be interpreted in hundreds of ways, changing with time and place. In this particular moment it means «you are human if you act at all times like the *homo oeconomicus* you are supposed to be», taking no account of emotions, instincts and *joie de vivre*, and instead working hard for the maximization of your profit<sup>1</sup>.

Easier said than done. Being cold and calculating is much more difficult than expected, even for Wall Street sharks, because of a series of misinterpretations that took Descartes at face value and pushed his ideas further and further. For instance, it turns out that there are no «clear and distinct ideas»: neurosciences show that the human brain works in a different way and lots of stereotypes should be revised, for everyone's good. Antonio Damasio's work can clear the field from long-lasting illusions, and Pareto's theory of logical action will help illuminate the deep importance of the claim on humanity.

The expectations stemming from Descartes' error (Damasio 1994) are among the main roots of contemporary restlessness and diminishing self-satisfaction. People are finding it harder and harder to cope with structural, systemic shortcomings because they no longer trust themselves to be what they have been told they should be. Moreover, every single modern institution has been conceived and realized based on a specific kind of Man – a non-existent one – that was supposed to find his place within it and move in accord with its demands. Small wonder real men feel they are not up to it.

#### I - CARTESIAN COMMON SENSE

It happens now and then that some ideas intercept the deepest yearnings of a culture with such sharpness that they become its keystones, supporting and shaping its future developments. Such ideas escape their former scientific milieu and meld into a common heritage; with very few people noticing, they slip into every activity until they lose the original traits of a product of human ingenuity and turn into immutable aspects of human and social nature. This is the case with Descartes' famous statement, «I think therefore I am». Other philosophers have thoroughly criticized the French thinker's system, so it could be argued that taking it on again is a waste of time. But this is not a philosophical issue. Going along with modernity's compartmentalization of knowledge, it is easy to think that everything fits into a specialized niche for experts to contend with, and has no influence on the outside world. A philosopher's words are of any interest only to other philosophers and once they have proved them false, there is nothing else to say.

<sup>1</sup> Descartes' dichotomy *res extensa/res cogitans* paved the way to the final separation of reason and emotions, that from a philosophical point of view are far from divided, as the former should govern the latter and turn them into virtues (Natoli 2010). Modernity kept at it until in its rationalism no connections between the two were thinkable any longer, which makes filling this particular gap a priority of the Humanities, even though «sensible reason» sounds today like an oxymoron (Maffesoli 1996).

Unfortunately, things in the real world are a bit different. From time to time ideas and visions, knowing nothing of disciplinary barriers, escape the narrow kennel of authors and specialists and get out into the open. If they mix epistemological subtlety and imaginal potential, are perfectly timed and enjoy some good luck, they can become fundamental elements of the *Weltanschauung* of the group and of the self-representation of its members, thenceforward impervious to pamphlets and new theoretical constructions. Common sense incorporated Descartes' maxim, slowly turning it into a dogma, into something so patently true you needn't worry about it any longer. So it is the *vulgata* based on the French philosopher's ideas – that is still shaping Western societies disregarding expert knowledge – that has to be addressed and modified in order to start changing things, which is what these pages aim to do.

The same happened with several other items from Descartes' theory as well. It may not be evident, but the contemporary world is imbued with Cartesian legacies: just think about coordinate axes – the obvious tool to represent, reduce and understand reality – and the way in which they have shaped imagination and research. Today it is «natural» to think of oneself as a bodiless point wandering the world, defined only by two numbers, the GPS coordinates kindly provided by smartphones and other ubiquitous gadgets. A rational bodiless point, to be more precise. Say one thing for Descartes, he surely knew how to forge powerful ideas.

Powerful does not mean true, but it still poses an interesting question: where does this power come from? In a paradoxical way, one of the fathers of rationalism reveals himself as a master of imagination, in touch with the underlying currents that influence and move social conscience. It is impossible to say if this was self-evident to Descartes or just the result of a strong intuition: fact is that he addressed most of the existential tensions that still trouble humanity and devised effective solutions operating on multiple plans. Whence the centuries-old fascination for *cogito ergo sum*: it is an easy way to be reassured about one's continued humanity. Nowadays this is not easy to see, as men and women affect to take it for granted, while few people are brave enough to admit to some doubt on the issue or share it with others. What happens on the inside, though, is a far cry from this displayed self-assurance and we should start taking this into account to gain a better understanding of what is going on. Whatever Ego has to say about it, self-awareness is not a given state, but rather an unceasing process that requires care and attention with no guarantee whatsoever of success. Everyone is acquainted with daytime spells of absence during which «I» evaporates and things seem to happen on their own, not to mention the nighttime eclipse of sleep, still mysterious and unfathomable.

Yet, in spite of this everyday experience, extreme modern rhetoric treats humanity as something outdated that should be left behind as soon as possible. Technology has evolved into what many authors consider now a new *Cosmos* (Turnbull 2012). It can boost human senses and abilities – at least those that are deemed worth the cost and coincide strangely with the Cartesian representation of the *res cogitans* – beyond their current limits, so the «old» human being seems obsolete. The advent of *post-humanity* or *trans-humanity* is only a matter of years away, and everyone would do well to be prepared or risk to be left behind with the dead weight that is slowing down Progress. Such affirmations are misleading and give rise to hopes and expectations that will be

hard to meet, while doing nothing to solve the riddle about humanity. *There is a gap between what you have been convincingly told you should be and what you are that makes it hard for you to understand, even recognize, yourself.* You are left alone to deal with this gap and it gets unsettling because no one has ever gone into much detail about what it means to be human: there is a general sense of rationality and goodness and light, great words like «trust» and «truth» and a half-acknowledged superiority with regard to the rest of the world. How does it happen, then, that at times this righteousness wanes and you think and act like an animal? Strange, though, that no real animal has ever acted like that (D'Andrea 2014: 78-89).

There is no sure rule to settle the matter. To judge by the silence about it one could even think there is no matter to settle. But yet, on the inside, uncertainty is on the loose and one needs effective ways to keep it at bay. Descartes seems to make sense and one goes along. Whatever the French philosopher had in mind in his day, however, is long gone: *what exists today is a normative set of behaviour models that are thought to stand for what a human being should be and do in most situations.* It is a special sort of human being, one arising from dreams and wishes that reason does not acknowledge, but which steer its course nonetheless: an increasingly insubstantial being, devoid of passions and instincts, abstractly rational, strictly economical and consequently good (Maffesoli 2002). No «dark half» here, no Mr. Hyde in sight. The problem is that this imaginary man does not exist in the flesh, yet has become the yardstick of any performance and expectation so that, after being weighed in the balance, one will always be found wanting. Worst of all, one will always find oneself wanting.

## II - ELLIOT'S CASE

The importance of being rational is closely linked to the essential doubt about one's own humanity, not only because of Descartes, but also on account of a real deep connection between the two. This has to do with the birth and evolution of conscience (Neumann 1978) and the contradictorial relation it entertains with subconsciousness and the unconscious mind (Durand 1984). Being human, one might say, is a complex flow in which reason plays a key role, but not the only one: it should be open to other instances and suggestions and balance their influences, if needed. As it is, this overseer role is far from what is prevalent and that is this essay's main issue. Even though Descartes surely did not have contemporary rationalism in mind, he did stress some aspects of man's self-representation that in time have become mandatory and have been interpreted in stricter and stricter ways. From this arises the problem of unfulfillable expectations and its many consequences.

Descartes' reason is luminous, incorporeal and abstract. It defines a constellation of sense in which matter, instincts and emotions have no place, while pure thought, logic and calculus fit perfectly. If one should interpret the subsequent trajectory of Western culture according to these *ins* and *outs*, one would find the current cultural configuration almost to the smallest detail. That is to say, we seem to have built our world following Descartes' vision, which we made our own.



It would be great if Descartes were right. Sadly he was not, as Damasio clearly showed, and something has to be done to put things back together in a more comfortable way. To begin with, it could be interesting to explain how a neurobiologist came to write a book about philosophy and why it is so relevant to this discourse. Antonio Damasio (b. 1944) never shared the opinion, common in his field of research, that emotion is not a worthy subject of enquiry. In the 70s of the XX century, thanks to his wife Hannah's neuroimaging skills and the fateful encounter with a special patient, whom he referred to as Elliot, he began to think he might be right and in the end became convinced that «the traditional views on the nature of rationality could not be correct. I had grown up accustomed to thinking that the mechanisms of reason existed in a separate province of the mind» – he says – «where emotion should not be allowed to intrude, and when I thought of the brain behind that mind, I envisioned separate neural systems for reason and emotion. This was a widely held view of the relation between reason and emotion, in mental and neural terms» (Damasio 1994: XI).

This set of given ideas is radically shaken by Elliot's case: «He had had an entirely healthy mind until a neurological disease ravaged a specific sector of his brain and, from one day to the next, caused this profound defect in decision making. The instruments usually considered necessary and sufficient for rational behaviour were intact in him. He had the requisite knowledge, attention, and memory; his language was flawless; he could perform calculations; he could tackle the logic of an abstract problem. There was only one significant accompaniment to his decision-making failure: a marked alteration of the ability to experience feelings. Flawed reason and impaired feelings stood out together as the consequences of a specific brain lesion, and this correlation suggested to me that feeling was an integral component of the machinery of reason» (*ivi*: XII). *Connecting rationality – and humanity, as it has been seen – with flesh and emotion may seem an easy step, but appearances are deceiving*. When one is forced to focus on one's self-representation, the ancient dichotomy body/soul is the «natural» choice, even without any religious nuance, and this is not only true of common sense: expert knowledge too tends to be influenced by this kind of presumption, which has nourished Western culture since its beginnings. Body and soul have no ties: the latter lives – or is imprisoned – in the former until it can be released. Thus it is hard to think of oneself as a system of neural systems, the result of the perfect timing of billions of synapses; it is hard to think of not being a unity, a *unicum*, the one and only «me», just as one is used to feel oneself as one piece, one body, not a collection of organs, bones and tissues: «The background body sense is continuous, although one may hardly notice it, since it represents not a specific part of anything in the body but rather an overall state of most everything in it» (*ivi*: 152). In the inner imagination, soul is complete and flawless, a *res cogitans* that maintains an aura of mystery and otherworldliness; it is not something that can be partially damaged or that is subject to malfunctioning due to brain deterioration.

When this unsettling possibility first presented itself, in the XIX century, in the famous case of Phineas Gage that marks the ideal starting point of Damasio's research, no one gave it any credit: «To understand Gage's behavioural change would have meant believing that normal social conduct required a particular corresponding brain

region, and this concept was far more unthinkable than its equivalent for movement, the senses, or even language» (*ivi*: 13). Social skills, ethical evaluation, decision making: they all cannot but issue from a unique, indivisible source, that same entity that helps fighting back the anguish that comes from mortality, whether one is aware of it or not. *Scientific thought shares not only values with common sense and ideology, but also imaginal constellations that result in options of thinkability.* This observation reveals the complex influence of the predominant paradigm of an era: under Descartes' spell (surely for other, deeper reasons too), we keep thinking that only rational thought guides our choices and plans and we disregard discoveries and criticisms coming from that same scientific milieu that is however becoming more and more rigid in its acquiescence to invisible dogmas.

A paradigm can be defined as «*the promotion/selection of master concepts of intelligibility [...].* Thus, the paradigmatic level is the level of the principle of selection of ideas to be integrated into the discourse or theory, or refused and rejected» (Morin 1999: 8). No one knows when and why these selections happen. The reasons why are obscure and it is more than likely that rationality plays a minor role in their formulation, if they have ever been clearly formulated. The deep level to which Morin refers is where the primordial act of foundation occurs that gives birth to the «finite section of the meaningless infinity of events in the world, endowed with meaning and significance from a human perspective» (Weber 2012: 119), that is to say culture according to Weber. These rules influence the development of a culture well beyond subjective and social awareness in ways that are not merely rational, even though Western men do their best to pretend they are. The old prejudice against emotion in neurosciences is just an example of the subtle stretch on intelligibility exerted by the implicit convictions that fostered the success of Descartes' maxim.

Damasio was not daunted by their strength and succeeded in proving them false, at least in this instance. It was an experience that urged him to think beyond the specificity of Elliot's case. Thus he recognized Morin's paradigmatic blindness at work and started to move against it, subverting several Cartesian «truths» by affirming the importance of emotion, previous experience and the role of pre-rational neuro-structures in the dynamics of rational choice. This is what makes his work so useful in this context: it shows a similar need to cross disciplinary barriers and address a wider arena and is a powerful tool to reveal the empirical untenability of the social extensions of Descartes' argument, in which common sense still takes root. Moreover, Damasio offers an interesting model of complex discussion that could help frame a new paradigmatic style.

According to him, then, if you want reason you have to take emotions into account as well. What of a culture where this sharp separation keeps on being invoked at every turn?

«The paradigm grants privilege to certain logical operations to the detriment of others, such as disjunction to the detriment of conjunction; and grants validity and universality to its chosen logic. Thereby it gives the qualities of necessity and truth to the discourse and theory it controls. By prescription and proscription the paradigm founds the axiom and expresses itself in the axiom» (Morin 1999: 8). This goes on until too many anomalies finally unhinge the axiom, but at that point you have a world that has been more or less totally shaped by a very specific sense and encompassing logic.

## III - THE GREAT PRETENDERS

This is a world one should fit in with no stress or difficulty, as it has been built according to the same discourse that defines humanity and everyone should feel comfortable and safe in its embrace. Still things are tougher than expected.

Even Pareto had to acknowledge the gap between real life and life-as-expected when he started to consider data about everyday behaviour. His intellectual career is a good example of the clash between sincere convictions on the one hand and reality on the other – and of the difficulty to make the two come to terms within one's mind. Pareto started as an engineer but soon found that economics better suited him, and he built a swift and long-lasting reputation in the discipline, being one of its outstanding representatives in Europe at the beginning of the XX century.

He then became a sociologist. Today it is hard to make sense of someone who abandons a position of privilege and respect in order to follow a need to understand. In Pareto the need to understand human behaviour was stronger than personal advantage, even if it went against his positivistic faith and led him to some paradoxical steps. For instance, he estimated what he called «logical actions» to be more or less 8% of the total of observable actions, the rest – 92% – being made of «nonlogical actions». He considered the former to be those that «show a perfect correspondence between subjective perception and empirically definable objective reality» (Federici 1991: 11) and the latter those where there is no such correspondence. As Coser put it, «nonlogical action is simply taken to mean all action not falling within Pareto's explicit definition of the logical; it is a residual category» (1977: 388).

When a «residual category» includes 92% of the whole, some doubts about its residuality should arise. This is not the case in Pareto's theory. Even though he is well aware of the disproportion between the two categories, he perseveres in explaining the second by the obscure working of a peculiar class of constructs, the «residues». These are essentially indeterminate and strongly tied to feelings, emotions and instincts, and are the layer from which nonlogical actions spring. There is no need here to go too deeply into Pareto's discourse – a few remarks about his terminological choice should suffice. A residue, says Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is «a usually small amount of something that remains after a process has been completed or a thing has been removed». Enough has been said about the unusual amount of this particular something which would make any process resulting in it far from profitable. What is left to take into account is the process itself.

To figure out what Pareto had in mind when he selected that specific word to explain nonlogical actions, a broader perspective is needed. The process he was thinking about was on a far larger scale than individual subjects or even groups or cultures: it was evolution at work on the strange matter of humanity. Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, and it became at once another keystone of Western man's self-representation, along the lines of Descartes' motto and in its wake. Even though it referred to animal species, other thinkers wasted no time in extending its dynamics to the human race, contradictorily divided between *res cogitans*' spirituality and *res extensa*'s animal mechanicity. The question then arose as to what kind of evolution

could be suitable for such a peculiar being, which of his many characteristics would flourish and be continually enhanced.

What better answer than rationality?

If that is the hallmark of pure and higher humanity, a process imbued in Modern optimism cannot but focus on it, making it purer and sharper. Cartesian common sense offered once again the perfect solution to an otherwise kaleidoscopic dilemma, while Darwinian theory already fit within its frame. This remark has nothing to do with scientific soundness. It has a lot to do with paradigm and social imagination and the way in which knowledge tends to conform to certain patterns and grow along their frame. Today it is known that evolution is not a linear process and is not always destined toward resounding success; yet this is the way in which it is still largely perceived, in accord with Modernity rhetoric. *Residues are what is left of pre-rational, archaic humanity after millennia of evolution.*

Even though Pareto's faith in Progress and Science forced him to name them in such an unsuitable way, they are still responsible for 92% of human actions. This fact should pose a serious problem to anyone who thinks of him/herself as only rational – which means nearly everybody – as he/she cannot cope with such a disproportion between expectations and reality. Pareto addresses this issue with a stroke of genius: his description of nonlogical actions not only registers the influence of residues, but goes on to add another crucial component, the derivation, an *a posteriori* rationalization of the nonlogical action that allows the actor, who is unaware of it, to keep on believing he has been rational all along: «Pareto argued that although men most often fail to engage in logical action, they have a strong tendency to “logicalize” their behavior, that is, to make it appear as the logical result of a set of ideas» (Coser 1977: 389). For him, as well as for nearly everybody, this is a given to which nothing need be added. It is a strategy to make up for humanity's delay in becoming what it should have been in the first place. Still, this idea makes sense so long as Descartes is right; when this is no longer the case, it might be contended that the urge to conform to rationalistic standards is indeed a strategy, aimed however at other ends: to make evident to oneself and to others the fact of one's humanity, from which descends the right to belong to human society and therefore to exist. Since Western culture chose to determine this fact by issuing a judgement on rationality, its members are bound to comply to varying expectations, based on what that judgement is about.

Western culture built these expectations on strong convictions that it made up as facts when ancient authority could no longer be relied upon (Poovey 1998; Shapin 2010). Scientific thought tried its best – and it still does – to give solid foundations to the knowledge it creates while affirming to reveal it, but it was born on Cartesian ground and its every move, until the XX century, confirmed and consolidated its core belief. Then came Einstein, Heisenberg, Gödel and those unshakeable grounds started to bump and grind.

#### IV - PARTS OF THE MACHINE

According to Morin, «true rationality is by nature open and engaged in dialogue with the real, which resists it. It constantly goes back and forth between the logical instance and the empirical instance; it is the fruit of debate of ideas, and not the prop-

erty of a system of ideas» (1999: 7). This can be truly considered one of the hallmarks of humanity, but being rational today has become something entirely different and scarcely human. Driven by its force, Modernity reached too far and what Mayntz and Nedelmann called «eigendynamik Prozesse» (1987) took the upper hand. Modern strategies could no longer keep them in check, even though they thought they could and still do. As Beck put it, «the challenges of the beginning of the twenty-first century are being negotiated in terms of concepts and recipes drawn from the early industrial society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries», which results «in a kind of “organized irresponsibility”» (2009: 28): a situation where procedures are ineffective and no one can be held accountable for anything. There is evidently an economic side to it, as Modern society, Beck's *Risikogesellschaft*, based its success on three pillars: calculability, assessability and compensation. Man was aware of his responsibility in the making of society; he knew he could not be certain of the consequences of his actions, but he also knew he could repay potential victims whose number would be acceptable on an adequate scale; there would be a reasonable redistribution of profits and a more or less generalized well-being. This works no longer. Nowadays, «the world is confronted with large-scale threats whose origin lies in the triumphs of modern society, threats which, in view of the institutionalized state promise of security, can nevertheless neither be adequately confirmed nor attributed, nor compensated, nor (preventively) managed in accordance with prevailing legal, scientific and political principles» (Beck 2009: 30).

The goals that the emphasis on rationality – turned into rationalization – meant to achieve: certainty and control, get blurred and confused and people are left to fend for themselves: «Sociologists talk a lot about and conduct extensive research on insecurity, though they generally mean by this social insecurity. They thereby overlook what a dramatic decline of ontological security now confronts lifeworlds, even in the peaceful corners of the earth» (*ivi*: 45-46). Western men and women suffer from a growing disproportion between the complexity their culture has attained and their understanding, let alone their handling, of it. What is worse, they live in a social world that has been created and shaped according to Descartes: a world where organisations and institutions are imagined as immense machines and people working within them as cogs and wheels. It all fits within the rationalistic scheme that nonetheless captures only a partial view of the whole, reducing reality to its measurable, mathematical side like an implacable bed of Procrustes. Qualitative, symbolic, emotional aspects of life go unrecognized and then get actively suppressed as «residues» that can only hinder the smooth running of all-pervasive technology.

If man's Cartesian representation did coincide with reality, humanity might thrive in such a world. As it is, the distance between the two has rarely been wider and it all looks and feels like a nightmarish Truman Show where it is impossible to live up to shared (and constantly broadcasted) expectations, and good sense and common sense diverge and often clash. From a guiding light amidst the turmoil of passions and unrestrained emotions, «reason» has become a yardstick to measure and evaluate the natural world and society, to give or deny sense to every aspect of life. It finds a logic that «counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them [...]». It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the

riots in our cities». Yet «it measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile» (Kennedy 1968).

One of the great questions to which the Humanities should seek an answer has to do with the consequences of this gap. As Modernity reengineered the whole Western society according to its creed, it could be argued that its members are today living their lives within an institutional framework hardly able to understand and satisfy their needs (Habermas 2011). Society is made possible by everyone's expectation to find a place in it to be oneself. What would happen if people started thinking otherwise is another challenging question. One would expect a progressive abandonment of public and institutional life, a growing fear of the Other, the end of cooperation and solidarity and the growth of hate movements and conflicts on the national and international level, not to mention the erosion of trust and the strengthening of feelings of anxiety and uncertainty...

It could be argued that attributing such weight to a long-dead philosopher's words is exaggerated, as it probably is. Descartes has to be acquitted, in order to better understand: *his was the perfect formulation of a deep-felt, primordial trend in Western culture that, slowly at first and then at growing speed, has established itself as the only legitimate way to imagine life and society*. Having never acknowledged the importance of the crucial spheres of meaning that got evacuated with the rest of the *res extensa*, it has no way to cope with the imbalance that this causes in social and existential equilibria; furthermore, people born within this paradigm have neither understanding nor instruments to manage emotional and symbolic impulses and are in fact left at their mercy, in a moment when consolidated ways are dramatically losing their grip on reality. The need for a paradigmatic shift is urgent, as no lifeworld is left untouched and systemic flaws are as frequent as subjective shortcomings, and it can only be ushered by a radical re-thinking of Modernity's unspoken certainties. This is mostly why this essay focuses on interdisciplinary strategies meant to foster a new cooperation – if not coevolution (Kauffman 1995) – between forms of knowledge that need ally in this enterprise. Bridging the gap between reason and emotions has already been seen as a worthy objective by hardy thinkers – among whom Fromm (1956) stands out, who turned mainly to psychoanalysis to pursue it or, more recently, Bauman (2001) in his brilliant description of liquid modernity and its consequences – but they are still within the Modern paradigm, even though from critical perspectives. These seem to have little room left for action, constantly hindered as they are by procedures and instrumental evaluations that strongly remind of censorship; luckily enough, however, things tend to happen with a total disregard of expert previsions, which could be the silver lining of the «organized irresponsibility» cloud. Still, trying to surf events instead of being their hard-headed victim all along might be a good idea and the old/new question about what it means to be human might be as good a starting point as any.

FABIO D'ANDREA  
*Università degli Studi di Perugia*

## REFERENCES

- BAUMAN Z.  
(2001) *The Individualized Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- BECK U.  
(2009) *World at Risk*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- COSER L.A.  
(1977) *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York.
- DAMASIO A.R.  
(1994) *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Avon Books, New York.
- D'ANDREA F.  
(2014) *Un mondo a spirale. Riflessioni a partire da Michel Maffesoli*, Liguori, Napoli.
- DURAND G.  
(1984) *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire. Introduction à l'archétypologie générale*, Dunod, Paris (éd. or. 1969).
- FEDERICI M.C.  
(1991) *Dove fondano le libertà dell'uomo*, Borla, Roma.
- FROMM E.  
(1956) *The Art of Loving*, Harper&Row, New York.
- HABERMAS J.  
(2011) *Il ruolo dell'intellettuale e la causa dell'Europa. Saggi*, tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- KAUFFMAN S.  
(1995) *At Home in the Universe. The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York.
- KENNEDY R.  
(1968) *Speech on GDP*, University of Kansas, March 18th (<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/24/robert-kennedy-gdp>) (26/12/16).
- MAFFESOLI M.  
(1996) *Eloge de la raison sensible*, Grasset, Paris.  
(2002) *La part du diable. Précis de subversion postmoderne*, Flammarion, Paris.
- MAYNTZ R. - NEDELMANN B.  
(1987) *Eigendynamik sozialer Prozesse. Ammerkungen zu einem analytischen Paradigma*, «Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie», 4, pp. 648-668.
- MORIN E.  
(1999) *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, UNESCO Publishing, Paris.
- NATOLI S.  
(2010) *L'edificazione di sé. Istruzioni sulla vita interiore*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- NEUMANN E.  
(1978) *Storia delle origini della coscienza*, pres. di G. Tedeschi, pref. di C.G. Jung, tr. it. Astrolabio, Roma (ed. or. 1949).
- POOVEY M.  
(1998) *A History of the modern Fact. Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

- SHAPIN S.  
(2010) *Never Pure. Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority*, JHU Press, Baltimore.
- TALEB N.N.  
(2010) *The Bed of Procrustes: Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms*, Random House, New York.
- TURNBULL N.  
(2012) *Instrument and Noumenon: Experimental Science and the Mysticism of the Instrument*, «Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics», 1, pp. 239-261.
- WEBER M.  
(2012) *Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. by H.H. Bruun and S. Whimster, Routledge, London and New York.