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TRUSTING THE HUMAN: A SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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Scientists and engineers are usually working with the standard of scientific objectivity of space-time reality based on the measures of physics. This is to ensure reliable knowledge we can trust. In contrast, human everyday thinking and behaviour control in real life settings suggest that humans experience various distortions of reality (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1991). These distortions can be subjective but they are often systematic and labelled as biases that could undermine the reliability of everyday "know how" of humans. It is a challenge for scientist to understand why human behaviour remains mostly successful despite these distortions and biases. Moreover, human behaviour is also controlled by social norms, which consist of objective ethical rules that are often biased by subjective interpretations usually driven by self-interest. To put differently, interests of individuals or groups of individuals can be in conflict with the interest of the larger group (society) embodied in ethical rules. Empirical studies provide evidence on the specific aspects of these conflicts.

Research suggest that we are bestowed a 'hungry self', in other words, there is a built-in psychological dissatisfaction that leads individuals to pursue personal power and influence over altruistic and communitarian considerations embodied in ethical rules (Batchelor, 2011). Exchanges between humans are organised overwhelmingly on the basis of mutual advantage; cooperation is a shared moral value across societies worldwide in its dimension of reciprocity and supporting one's own group (Mauss, 1924; Curry, Mullins, Whitehouse, 2019). According to Curry et al.'s study (2019), by looking at 60 societies across the globe, deferring to superiors is also a commonly found value; together with conformism (Asch 1956) and groupthink (Janis, 1972), these can lead to discarding opinions or evidence contrary to the interests of a group or its leaders. Even without considering group pressure, studies on human's capability to form meaningful relations has been limited to around 150 people (Dunbar, 1992). On the contrary, it is known that various type of psychological processes can generate a sense of distance from other's people's suffering, or indeed to problems of general interest (Trope & Liberman, 2010): the more the distance, whether is geographical or cultural, the higher the level of "construal" that is needed to feel personal engagement.

In summary, research on cultural, social and psychological processes suggest that humans cannot be trusted in observing social norms. Thus, safeguarding the interest of human society humans need a supraordinate system of rules and principles that will form a sort of moral exoskeleton that protects the society and sanctions/punishes the violation of the norms.

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