# Why don’t we just do the right thing?

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# Unability to let words being followed by deeds?

- Decisions for sustainable development?
  - Rio? E.g.Energy policy?
  - Climate change? Copenhagen? Or Mexico?
  - And more (Millenium Goals etc.) …

# Explanatory ”frameworks”?

- Political economy of power / class (”Marxist”?)
- Post-modernity? -> fragmentation of society and proliferation of beliefs?
- Or some version of ”naturalism”: evolution only maximising not optimising strategy; competition and benefit seeking contrary to holistic management?
- Or some version of ”idealism”: concepts collide and frameworks of thinking (paradigms) get in the way?

# Example food security:

- Food and the population issue
- Food and climate
- Food and natural resources
- Food and health
- Food and markets / economies?

# Solutions?

- Either one-dimensional,
  - All vegetarians?
  - Aquaculture: developing the wrong species at the wrong places?
  - Food safety at the price of food security?
- Or / and institutional decisions tools based on ”limited” (?) notion of rationality:
  - risk.-cost-benefit analysis?
  - Economic thinking versus ethics: discount rates?

# Some problems:

- (ethical) values differ
- No good probabilistic estimates of outcomes,
- Whose costs? Whose benefits?
- Critical assumptions problematic (e.g. growth)
- Local (non-global) benefits open for free-riders
- Result: agents waiting for each other, no action, no committment.

# 1. Understanding complex systems

- Large number of parameters
- Multiple equilibria points
- Emergent properties
- Non-linearity, non predictability
- Limited manipulation
- Major inherent system uncertainties
- Open systems interacting with other open systems

# Consequences?

- Give up Cartesian thinking / Newtonian frameworks
- Look at resilience for management:
  - Tolerance of disturbances before major shifts
  - Social, ecological, economic,…?
- Contextualisation of risks

# 2. Decision heuristics

- Herbert Simon (1957) Models of Man on bounded rationality.
- Not optimising, but satisfycing!
  - Implicit criticism of economic rationality
  - Also A. Sen (on values etc).
- Decision heuristics!
  - Evolutionary anchored?
  - Rules of thumb?

# Decision theory and social psychology

- Decision theory -> normative?
- Social psychology -> descriptive?
  - Kahnemann, Tversky and others: heuristics that lead to cognitive bias or fallacy
  - Gerd Gigerenzer et al.: heuristics that lead to better decisions than formal methods (Bayesianism, multiple regression analysis)

# Heuristics e.g.:

- the availability heuristic (judging the frequency of an event by the ease with which it comes to mind),
- anchoring heuristic (adjusting the judging of probability depending on the initial fixation),
- attribute substitution (judging a complex problem, e.g. a moral one, by relating to a known but different problem),
- framing (a tendency to react to a problem based on how it is presented),
- Recognition heuristic (selecting an object from a set of alternatives based on one or few recognised values of the object)
- etc.

# The potential of heuristics for sustainable development?

- Framing? Levelling out GHG emissions of 18000 cars a reason for a ”vegi-Thursday” (Gent)?
- Planning? Dietary habits of consumers easier to adjust than with principles options?

# 3. Values

- Value trade-offs versus value changes?
- Economy: trade-off
- Ecology: change
- Choice of instruments: economic incentives, polluter-pays, trading of quotas,mitigation banking etc.
- Or: education, dialogue
- But: values are constitutive of our identity?

# 4. Evidence

- Kitcher's call for "well-ordered science"
- Ravetz, Cartwright, Montuschi et al translate this into "evidence for use"
- Evidence: frequentist versus Bayesian schools.
- Evidence-based policies?
- Randomized controlled trials?
- But: only truth in basic exact sciences?
- Context and causal interactions!

# Juggling with concepts for sustainability?