RATIONALIZING THE IRRATIONAL
THE PRINCIPLE OF RELATIVE MAXIMIZATION
FROM SOCIobiology TO Economics AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS

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FEBRUARY 2007
Rationalizing the Irrational. The Principle of Relative Maximization 
from Sociobiology to Economics and Its Implications for Ethics*

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October 2006 (revised February 2007)

* The present essay is based on original research in progress carried by the author on the foundations 
of human behavior and their applications to political science and economics. The paper is an extension 
and an application of author’s theory of fitness extraction, advanced in Boari, M. 2005a, 2005b, and 
currently developed by work in progress. The essay was presented at the ESSEC Workshop Moral 
Foundations of Management Knowledge, October 13-14, 2006, Cergy. The present version includes 
minor revisions, several footnotes and an integration of the visual presentation during the workshop. A 
shorter, modified version will appear in a follow-up anthology edited by Radu Vranceanu and Marie-
Laure Djelic, to be published by Elgar.

I wish I convey my thanks and my salute to the following associates: to Radu Vranceanu, for bringing 
about the occasion for this work and for his general appreciation of my work. To Alan Jenkins, for 
being such an extraordinary part-time colleague, during my sojourns at ESSEC. To my long-time 
friends Laurent Bibard and Sorin Cucerai, for the discussion of countless points comprised in, or 
indirectly linked to this study. To Cosmin Stanciu-Dinulescu, for bearing with me during endless 
musing over points of, otherwise, shared interest, many of them still lingering in the deepest recesses 
of this text.

This essay is affectionately dedicated to the memories of P. and M.
Abstract

Starting with the concept of “rational maximizing individual”, a meta-construct with foundational value in economics and, in general, in human sciences, the paper delineates the territory of an ethics of rationality. It does this by taking fulcrum in findings from evolutionary theory, in particular those regarding spiteful behavior. The paper formulates the principle of “differential fitness maximization”, as expression of relative maximization of fitness and derives its consequences, among which, a core set of normative propositions grounding the said ethics. Thus, the paper strengthens the backbone of the Western philosophical tradition which, in essence, always associated ethical conduct with reason and individualism.

Keywords: Evolutionary Ethics, Fitness, Normative Ethics, Rational Maximization, Spite

Résumé

Commençant par la notion “d’individu rationnel maximisateur”, un méta-concept à valeur fondatrice dans la science économique et, en général, dans les sciences humaines, l’essai dessine le territoire d’une éthique de la rationalité. Le but est achevé en prenant appui sur des données offertes par la théorie évolutionniste, en particulier sur ceux concernant le comportement appelé “spite”. L’essai formule le principe de la “maximisation différentielle du fitness”, en tant qu’expression de la maximisation relative du fitness, et dérive ses conséquences, parmi lesquelles le set central des propositions de la dite éthique. Ainsi, l’essai apporte de la solidité à la tradition philosophique occidentale qui, depuis toujours, a en effet associé le comportement éthique à la raison et à l’individualisme.

Mots-Clés : Éthique évolutionniste, Éthique normative, Fitness, Maximisation rationnelle, Spite

JEL Classification Index: A19, B52, C73, D01, P00, Z19
Rationalizing the Irrational. The Principle of Relative Maximization from Sociobiology to Economics and Its Implications for Ethics


The rational individual is the cornerstone of the utility maximizing and rational choice theories. But this principle is much more than a convenient model in economics. It also represents the cornerstone of Western civilization: an individualist ethics, moral, legal, political structures informed by individual rights and liberty, are built on the same foundation. Equally, the rational individual is the pinnacle of two thousand years of philosophy in the West, as evidenced by its peak moments in Greek antiquity, Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Last but not least, the principle of rational individual is in agreement with contemporary findings in neurophysiology. Historically speaking, capitalism was the brief period which captured these various threads in a coherent pattern, making thus possible progress on the material, moral and intellectual lines.

1. Overview of central topics concerning rationality

In terms of method, the principle of rationally maximizing (optimizing, satisficing) individual was constantly challenged from within social sciences (sometimes even from within economics, like in the case of Heilbroner; Heilbroner, R., 1991, 1995a, 1995b) for being a rough simplification and reductionist (pejorative connotations included). But far from being an expedient simplification, it represents a delineation of an area of individual action characterized by logic, teleology (both substantial and procedural) and constructive behavior. In its best versions, economics does not deny the existence of an outer area of individual action: it is only that, given the characteristics of such an area, they cannot make the object of a science of man. Paraphrasing Kant, individual reasonableness is like an island of safety in the midst of the turmoil of a stormy and dark ocean. What is outside of the shores of the island makes rather the description of literature, drama and speculative philosophy. It is the reign of irrational, of wild impulses and destructive behavior. Aside Plato’s monument to reason, there existed the Greek tragedy, illustrating the disquieting attributes of the irrational. This contrast will be much later conceptualized, in a rather suggestive than descriptive (let alone explanatory) format to become successful in the humanities, by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as the opposition between Apollonian and the Dionysian.

During the past decades, the area outside of maximizing rationality has made the object of incursions on behalf of economists. Herbert A. Simon described the informational limitations placed upon rational processes and defined the concept of bounded rationality, while proposing “satisficing” as a replacement of
maximization/optimization (Simon, H. A, 1982). The research of Kahneman and Tversky chipped away from the confidence in the rational faculty, indicating that fallacies and errors of thought recurrently occur, in particular in probabilistic reasoning (Kahneman, D., Tversky, A., 1996; Kahneman, D., 2003a, 2003b). Recent research of Vernon Smith indicated the sensitivity of rational maximization to affective, political and social factors, determining him to propose two concepts of rationality, the constructive and the environmental (Smith, V., 1997, 2005). However, these researches do not fundamentally contradict the principle of rational maximizing individual: they rather increase the number of variables to be accounted for in the maximizing calculus (“externalities”). The most critical of these researches, which raised serious doubts about the functioning of the reasoning faculty in man, namely that of Kahneman and Tversky, has been clarified by Gigerenzer’s work showing that fallacies and biases can be ruled away if evolutionary psychological factors are accounted for (Gigerenzer, G., Todd, P. M., 2003; Vranas, P. B. M., 2000).

The fact that rationality is bound, imperfect, etc. and by that, maximization impossible, is ultimately irrelevant. The point remains that even in conditions of uncertainty, incomplete information, faulty cognitive apparatuses, extraneous variables to be accounted for, etc. individuals act as if to maximize their fitness. Along a path opened by authors such as Alchian (Alchian, A., 1950, 1952), Becker (Becker, G. S., 1962, 1976) and Hirshleifer (Hirshleifer, J., 1977, 1978, 1985), economics and decision theory meet sociobiology.

Social actors are maximizers of fitness and their decisions, whether correct or not, and their economic action, whether successful or not, aim precisely at this. The crucial point to be captured is that this maximization is not to be understood in absolute terms: in this respect, economic science may still be tributary to metaphysical assumptions, just like in the case of the theory of value. The standard which maximization/optimization ought to meet is not an absolute, determined from the vantage point of an external system of reference that the economist shares with God. The standard of maximality/optimization is determined from within, and is intrinsic to the competitive environment in which the actor (individual or some institutionalized grouping) performs. Maximization of fitness ought to be understood as maximization of fitness differentials between actors. Stressing the point, rational maximization is to be understood as relative maximization, as maximization by relation to the fitness of other actors. Stressing it even further, the rational self-interest of the actors is not to maximize in absolute terms, but to maximize in relative terms. Their self-interest is unconditionally satisfied if the fitness differential is lowered, and only conditionally satisfied if it is increased to their advantage by classic, absolute maximization actions. The first procedure is automatic; the second is conditional upon undecidable variables of absolute fitness maximization such as those revealed by the current research mentioned previously. This being made clear, the problem of relatively maximizing action can now be tackled.

2. The principle of relative maximization: from biology to social theory

Fitness of actors, be they individuals or firms, is co-variant. Therefore, it is by relation to other players that maximization ought to be performed.

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1 This section of the study uses material from current work in progress on spiteful fitness extraction, continuation of my work on the conceptual foundations of political biology (Boari, M., 2005b).
In a competitive environment, relative maximization of fitness can be achieved by two basic mechanisms. Only the first has made, until now, the object of interest for economics:

* improved performance, productivity and creativity, economic action par excellence (asymptotically tending either towards classic maximization, or towards “bounded” maximization, maximization understood as “satisficing”)

* reduction of fitness of competitors. This mechanism is further to be divided between two sub-classes: reduction of fitness of competitors without loss to one’s own fitness (preferable); reduction of fitness of competitors with losses of one’s own fitness (acceptable; see next).

It does not matter whether by the application of the second sub-mechanism the agent’s absolute fitness is lowered. Insofar as relative fitness is improved, which is to say, if the differential of fitness thereby produced is smaller, the result is maximal and the procedure perfectly rational.

The distinction hereby drawn corresponds and gives theoretical substance to the difference established by Albert Jay Nock, following Franz Oppenheimer (Oppenheimer, F. 1914/1997; Nock, A. J., 1935) between the “economic means” and the “political means”. The “economic means” represent modalities for an individual’s maximization of fitness by his/her own productivity and exchanges on the market, which is to say, they respond to “classical”, absolute maximization of economics. The “political means” are modalities to obtain a relative increase of fitness, by reducing the fitness of others.

Therefore, we shall call the first mechanism fitness differential maximization Type E, and the second mechanism, fitness differential maximization Type P. The following table captures synthetically the explanation above:

**Figure 1. Fitness Differential Maximization, $\delta$Ft Max**

- **Type E** • Increase of fitness differentials by self-exertion and increase of productivity. Characterized by concern towards performance & achievement of self. Defines the Economic means for self-preservation.

- **Type P** • Increase of fitness differentials by destruction of fitness of another. Characterized by concern towards performance & achievement of others. Defines the Political means of self-preservation.

The essence of the metaphysical assumptions in classic models is that self-interest is necessarily paired with positive-sum games; while the approach hereby presented indicates that this is not the case, that self-interest is perfectly consistent with negative-sum games (and, obviously, with zero-sum games in which one is the winner). Apart from deductive justifications, the rationale of the above claim is to be found in the human biologically evolved behavior. Even more, sociobiological and evolutionary psychological considerations indicate that zero-sum games are unconditional and context-independent, since based on behavioral automatisms; while
the constructivism involved in positive-sum games is conditional and context dependent, because non-automatic, relying on the exertion of intelligence (and, thus, dependent of its level) and upon learned algorithms. Finally, the unconditional character of negative-sum games versus the conditionality of positive-sum games is indicated by the need to enforce the second and to punish the first (overwhelmingly) by the (monopolistic) exercise of coercion. Therefore, from the two mechanisms for increasing relative fitness, Type P represents the Darwinian differential fitness maximization, whose biologically evolved infrastructure has to be specified.

Figure 2. $\delta F_t$ Max Type P

- $\delta F_t$ Max Type E: acquired (learned) => optional, conditional & context dependent
- $\delta F_t$ Max Type P: innate => mandatory, unconditional, context independent
- $\delta F_t$ Max Type P = Darwinian $\delta F_t$ Max
- Biological infrastructure of $\delta F_t$ Max Type P = ?

We are now in the position to understand that that which conventionally has been labeled “irrational” is the result of an erroneous thought process, which incorrectly assumes maximization as absolute maximization, and its correlates: continuous improvement, progress, constructivism, growth, development, increase of complexity, as taken for granted. Relative maximization is not necessarily correlated with such. The second mechanism hereby described indicates that maximization can still occur, with a destruction of complexity, regress, and reversed development: and this is concrete maximization, that which occurs in real-life environments as framed by evolved peculiarities of human nature, not in metaphysical models.

The difficult part of this argument is to understand irrationality positively, in view of its own raison d'être: and this, not merely from a deductive point of view. This difficulty has been made clear centuries ago, but with little consequence, by Spinoza: "Most of those who have written about [...] human conduct seem to be dealing not with natural phenomena that follow the common laws of nature but with phenomena outside Nature [...] They assign the cause of human weakness and frailty not to the power of Nature in general, but to some defect in human nature [...] They will doubtless find it surprising that I should attempt to treat of the faults and follies of mankind in the geometric manner, and that I should propose to bring logical reasoning to bear on what they proclaim is opposed to reason, and is vain, absurd and horrifying. But my argument is this: in Nature nothing happens which can be attributed to its defectiveness [...] Hatred, anger, envy, etc. considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and force of nature as all other particular things".2

different words, the "irrational" is not some unfortunate mishap, an accident, but it is a process which has to be understood in its own right.

Evolutionary theory only now begins to proceed with the investigation urged by Spinoza. Theorists working in an evolutionary vein such as Alexander, Hamilton, Wilson, to mention only some representative names, have suspected that purposeful destructiveness may be a biologically evolved mechanism. The behavior under discussion is called "spite" and it is the precise opposite of altruism.

![Figure 3. Spite According to E. O. Wilson](image)

Altruism is the behavioral capacity of increasing the fitness of another with a cost to one's own fitness. Altruism is made possible by genetic relatedness, which is to say, by the presence of the genes of the donor in the recipient: whatever increment of phenotypic fitness occurs for the recipient, it represents an apparent loss of fitness only at the phenotypic level for the donor, for it is an increase of his/her genotypic fitness. Whatever forms of altruism exist outside the boundaries of genetic relatedness, they obey rules of cost-benefit familiar to the economist. Indiscriminate altruism is inexistent. Discriminate altruism is either paid back in the form of reciprocation (exchange), including delayed and indirect reciprocation (for example,****

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in the case of humans, good reputation) or, otherwise, obeys the rule of differential marginal utility.\(^5\)

Spite, as opposite of altruism, is the behavioral capacity to produce a loss of fitness to another, even with a cost to oneself.

Evidence of spiteful behavior in species of lower complexity is sparse. Spite does appear to be neither homologous, nor analogous (convergent).\(^6\) It seems that the species capable of genuine spite are the humans and the chimpanzees.\(^7\)

**Figure 4. Spite in Chimps & Humans**

Further, one should differentiate between genuine spite and selfishness. Selfish behavior *may* amount to a diminishment of the fitness of another, but its rationale is advantage to self; while the characteristic of spite is precisely the facultative character of the advantage. Advantage *may* appear as a result to a spiteful action, but what is specific to it is the readiness of the actor to incur a loss only in order to produce a loss to another. As discussed above, the rationality of the behavior appears insofar as the result of the performed action is a reduction of the fitness differential.

The same ideas can be translated in a game theoretic vocabulary, but essentially expressing the same thing. The “economic means” correspond to games with a positive sum, whereby all parties gain; while the “political means” correspond to zero-sum games, whereby successive wins and losses, subjected to the aleatory of contingencies, determines the outcome, *and* games with negative sum, whereby one

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\(^5\) An intriguing hypothesis which would modify significantly the description above is that of eusociality in man. It makes the object of current work in progress.


\(^7\) Recent applications of spite theory to humans came to my attention while preparing the original workshop material for print: Gardner, A., West, S. A. (2004); West, S. A., Gardner, A. et al., 2006.
of the parties is ready to incur a loss, provided that the loss produced to another is larger and, thus, the fitness differential decreases in his/her favor.

**Figure 5. Spite: Sociobiology & Game Theory**

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<td>Positive Sum Games</td>
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<td>Zero-Sum Games</td>
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<td>Negative-Sum Games</td>
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| A C T O R B           | +          | - |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Cooperation           | Altruism   |

| Selfishness           | Spite      |

Phenomenologically, we can classify spite according to three scenarios, corresponding to a decrease in intensity of the spiteful manifestation and of the associated risk, and to an increase of frequency of the occurrence:

* **overt spiteful behavior:** willingness to harm another no matter what the cost; associated with high risk and high lethality

* **mitigated spiteful behavior:** willingness to harm another while reducing the expected cost to oneself by a variety of methods, which can be: some degree of self-containment, withdrawal, strategic modulation; concealment (plotting, scheming, intrigues, etc.)

* **subdued spiteful behavior:** the readiness to harm another remains below a certain threshold of actualization; various factors, among which inborn risk-taking capacity, make the manifestations of spite sporadic (when occasion arises), extremely tactical, eventually limited at the level of emotional hostility, moralistic aggressiveness, spiteful talk, and/or relegated to third parties (indirectness)

Both mitigated and subdued spite make massive use of deception, which is the factor differentiating them from overt spite. By that, they can conveniently be classified, along this variable, as **deceptive spiteful behavior**. However, deception is clear in the consciousness of the actor.

One subform of subdued spite does not involve overt or concealed actions aimed at the reduction of fitness in another, but merely expresses as refrainment from
action, or restriction of action, which may result in an increase of the fitness of another beyond a certain threshold of the fitness differential between this other and self. This subform of spite presupposes complicated rationalizations of the rapport between two individuals and involves the capacity of self-deception. The fitness differential is the crucial regulator of the "benevolence" individuals may experience one towards another. The form of spite hereby described represents the upper limit of the engagement towards another: above this limit, at even lower levels of the expression of spite, occur altruism and the requirement of either relatedness or reciprocity.⁸

Moral and political philosophies of various orientations always have had an awareness of the phenomenological varieties of spite classified above.

Overt spite occurs during aggression and violent conflict. An application of the overt spite can be found in the Kojevian rendition of the Hegelian master-slave dialectics.⁹ According to Hegel-Kojeve, history is set in motion by an anthropogenic fight between two generic humans. The outcome of the battle is decided by the amount of relative "negativity" exhibited by the two: the one who shuns fear of death, will be the victor and will become the master; the vanquished, will become the slave. Here, negating power measures the degree of humanness: the victor gains the recognition of the vanquished in his/her humanity, but this is not reciprocally the case. Beginning here, history starts its flow, as a continuous attempt of the slaves to reopen the fight and to homogenize the distribution of recognition. This is eventually being achieved by the instauration of a democratic, equalitarian state, moment when history ends.

Overt spite explains the problem of the so-called "doomsday machines", present in evolutionary psychology, military theory and international relations.¹⁰ The escalation of conflict to the level of vendettas corresponds to the readiness of harming another no matter what the costs to oneself. The very special trait of spite becomes now apparent: spiteful behavior is expressed even against the instinct of self-preservation and that is why it is generally qualified as "irrational". And that is also why the fact of its selection during the evolutionary process remains a delicate theoretical problem.

Finally, overt spite occurs during all genocidal actions.

Mitigated spite is driven chiefly by the willingness to reduce the cost to oneself of the spiteful action. Human political history is a largely writ illustration of this form of spiteful behavior. It is in this context that one could understand Carl Schmitt's essentialization of the "concept of the political" in the form of the friend-foe binomial: the lower limit of friendship is defined by the mitigation of spite (Schmitt, C., 1914/1976). Equally, it is in this context that we can fully make sense of Clausewitz's maxim according to which "war is a continuation of politics by different means" (Clausewitz, C. von, 1832/1991): war represents the transition from mitigated spite, characteristic of politics, to overt spite. But their common denominator is given by spite, the difference between them being a mere matter of degree.

⁸ See note 5 above re. "eusociality".
¹¹ Machiavelli, 1515/1965, ch. 5, pp. 23-24, advice to the prince concerning newly conquered territories in which subjects formerly knew the rule of law.
Subdued spite occurs whenever fear, interest, strategic calculation, third-party coercive restraint, kinship or symbolic identification, philosophy, aboulia and the elusive "good will" which, according to Kant, is the rarest of all things (Kant, I. (1785/1996) - or a combination of the above, prevents the escalation of spite to overt engagement. When it occurs, aggressiveness is maintained at the level of pre-violent expressions: emotional harassment, spiteful discourse, moralistic aggression in the form of injunctions and exhortations. Outbursts of violence punctuate it, usually rationalized as punishment. Mitigated spite characterizes a large section of common intercourse between humans, sometimes explored in anthropology and sociology.\(^\text{12}\)

Between such episodes, subdued spite gains expression, on a universal basis, at the psychological level as *envy* and, at the political level, as *equalitarianism*. According to Schoek, whom authored the only monograph on envy I have knowledge about, it is surprising how little attention has been given by social scientist to the issue of envy, considering its universality and its devastating character (Schoek, 1966). The likely explanation lies in the fundamental character of envy/spite: being so close to the root of human behavior, shrouded in a cloud of deception and self-deception, presenting itself with the evidence of obviousness, its investigation is particularly difficult. Envy ought to be neatly distinguished from greed: envy does not express one's desire to have more, but one's desire that another does not have. When confronted with a particular trait which s/he does not posses, the envious person would rather see that trait destroyed (Nozick, R., 1974).\(^\text{13}\) Envy expresses at the psychological level the fundamental mechanism of fitness differential reduction by means of a reduction of the fitness of another: and that is what makes it a phenomenological expression of spite. Repeatedly envy has been perceived by philosophers as the greatest threat to growth, development, and civilization.\(^\text{14}\) A combination between greed and envy produces the equalitarian drive. Ideally, the equalitarian would have more but equal to another. But since this seldom is possible due to natural factors of variability, s/he would rather have less provided that equality is preserved: or enforced coercively. In this context, obviously, equalitarianism should be understood in *substantial* terms, as used by socialist-communist or democratic redistributive ideology, not in the *procedural* terms of liberal political philosophy as equality of chance, opportunity and of legal rights. Being grounded in spite, a fundamental evolved behavior, sooner or later, all human orders based upon substantial equality reveal their coercive and destructive dimension (Mises, L. von, 1949/1966, p. 90). In its forms unstructured institutionally, this form of spite drives public opinion, the formation of majorities, repressiveness of difference and alterity, homogenization and leveling.\(^\text{15}\) In general, and having the value of a theorem, collective, group identity and gregarianism are scale phenomena whose driving force is the fundamental behavior called spite.

The milder version of subdued spite is ubiquitous in human life. Satirized by novelists and playwrights such as Molière, Balzac, Ionesco, by social philosophers such as Mandeville, and massively so by moralists of all persuasions and ages, mild spite takes the manifestation of "decorum", social pretense and hypocrisy. One of the, probably, numerous varieties has made the object of some sociobiological inquiry: it is *Schadenfreude*, the joy to the unhappiness of another.\(^\text{16}\) *Schadenfreude* expresses

\(^{12}\) Boari, M., 2000; Foucault, M., 1977; Cosmides, L. et al., 2002.
\(^{13}\) Especially p. 239, note 7. Also, for the connection envy - self-esteem.
the limit of spiteful behavior discussed above, when the most one can do, is to refrain from improving upon the fitness of another, if not diminishing it directly.

**Figure 6. Schadenfreude**

![Cartoon](https://www.scottadams.com/comics/dilbert/2003/06/06/schadenfreude/)

Scott Adams, Dilbert “Schadenfreude”, Wikipedia

In economic literature, the only contribution to the principle of relative fitness maximization I know of, perfect in its own way, is that of Alchian in the 1950s (Alchian, A., 1950). It is worth signaling the depth of Alchian's analysis, as well as the extremely limited (and uncomprehending) echo of his paper (Alchian, A., 1952; Penrose, E., 1953). Alchian was clearly aware of the importance of his findings albeit, in complete candor, he acknowledged that he does not see what they would lead to. What Alchian lacked were two things: on the one hand, the rooting of his theory of relative maximization into an understanding of the foundations of human behavior. This foundation can be recognized by the contemporary sociobiology as spite. Secondly, he did not see that relative fitness maximization is not a primeval principle in itself, but it is the expression of a deeper principle, namely that of the maximization of fitness differentials. Thirdly, lacking the two conditions specified above, he did not see how to integrate his findings in a wider set of consequences/implications. In order to acknowledge his contribution to the theory of fitness, I hereby propose that the relative maximization of fitness be called the Alchian corollary. The wider-encompassing principle to which it is subordinated being the principle of the maximization of fitness differentials, as hereby proposed.

It is in order to mention in this connection the tentative utilization of the dynamics of fitness in a sense congruent with the present analysis in the work of Garry Becker (Becker, S., 1962, 1976, 1993). Equally, for operationalizing the concept of fitness in an interdisciplinary, biology-politics-political economy context, the more recent work of Paul Rubin should be noted (Rubin, P., 2002).

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17 The development of the theory of relative fitness maximization by means of differential fitness manipulations has been developed independently and in the context of the continuation of my work on the foundations of political biology (Boari, M., 2005b). I discovered Alchian's work during the research for the present application of the theory. It came as an independent confirmation of the correctness of my conclusions.
The implication of the analysis above (and even less the assumption) is not that human beings are "evil" or "irrational". The characterization of spite and of the forms it takes, its description as a fundamental human behavior, merely indicates that humans are capable of acting equally so - and this, for evolutionary reasons. As a matter of fact, and as has been indicated formerly, what we are dealing with is a rapport between two distinct strategies for the increase of fitness: one which specifies a maximal utilization of one's own resources, faculties, natural endowments and willingness of self exertion; and another one, which spells out actions carried with the purpose of affecting the differential fitness with another by diminishing this other's fitness. What one needs to grasp, is the conditions determining which strategy prevails. It is only by that that prescriptive sentences could be formulated later.

The first condition refers to, as of now, indescribable conditions of innateness and hard wired brain structures. Given the quick pace of current fMRI studies, one can soon expect insights into the substratum of spiteful versus constructive behavior. Without getting into details, it is arguable that an index of prefrontalization conveniently devised (PFC Index) would reflect the basic functioning of this substratum (Boari, M., 2005a; 2005b).

The second condition for strategies of self-actualization and self-exertion is, to state the obvious, their possibility. They are excluded from the onset if external limiting conditions exist, at the system level or at the interpersonal level. Of foremost importance are system-wide external coercive limitations altering behavior by the use of threat or of force: that is, the political-legal system.

The third condition, related to the first, refers to the relative frequency of spiteful versus constructive strategies in the population. We can safely state that the frequency of constructive strategies will be larger if their open possibility exists.

The forth condition refers to facilitating or inhibiting conditions of a non-coercive kind comprised by, in sequence, the immediate and the wider socializing environment, education, culture: ethical formation included.

Figure 7. Factors Affecting δFt Max Strategy Frequency

- Inborn factors (PFC Index)
- Quality of environment of constraints impacting autonomy & individual entitlements = type of political regime
- Overall population relative frequency Ft Max E/Ft Max P
- Acquired factors: learning from social action & active observation of the social space => formation of quasi-reflex (habitual) social responses => activation/inhibition of Darwinian evolved responses (automatic)

Summing it up. Individuals will act as if maximizing their fitness, whether aware of it or not. The empirical measurement unit available to them is not some absolute scale of fitness degrees but a relative one; this relative estimate of fitness is overwhelmingly performed by relation to the social environment, by relation to the

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fitness of others. Humans always compare one with another: and the rationale of interpersonal comparison is relative fitness assessment. Among the two strategies available to them, self-exertion or spiteful intercourse, they will adopt the one which pays off more in terms of perceived fitness. The said adoption can take the form of a choice, that is, a conscious act of selection, but not necessarily so. The potential of adopting one strategy or another is biologically based; while the likelihood of which one is adopted depends on circumstantial variables, foremost the structure of penalties (laws) having as effect a limitation of the capacity to increase one's fitness by oneself. The consequence of such a setup is the diverting of the fitness increase drive in the direction of spiteful behavior.

This last consequence is in perfect agreement with the knowledge available in political philosophy since at least Montesquieu and Bentham: the moral character of the individuals is determined by the nature of the political regime in which they live. To this knowledge, we add the understanding of the fact that laws do not affect the urge of individuals to maximize their fitness, but merely the strategies, the paths they can adopt for the purpose. *In nuce*, social systems which protect and promote individual autonomy will know of less spiteful, irrational, destructive (and self-destructive) behavior (albeit, the expression of the less frequent spiteful behavior may be biased towards overt spite). Social systems which are interfering, controlling, regulating or otherwise limiting the individual drive to fitness maximization (and, by that, obtaining, in terms of level of fitness, a homogenized, or a "compact" social structure) are increasing the frequency of spiteful behavior in all its forms, but especially in the area of mitigated and subdued spite. Phenomenologically, such worlds have made the topic of copious literary investigation, with probably a culmination in the work of Franz Kafka (whence the adjective "Kafkaesque"). I propose to name the process leading to the prevalence of spite "the Kafka Process".

Figure 8. δFt Max Strategy/Type Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Legend:</th>
<th>Ft Max regulated/restricted/re-distributed (lack of /tampered with entitlements &amp; autonomy)</th>
<th>Ft Max distributed/unrestricted (entitlements &amp; autonomy)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sum Games</td>
<td>δFt Max Type P</td>
<td>δFt Max Type E</td>
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<td>Negative-Sum Games</td>
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<td>Relative frequency of prevalent social strategy of δ Ft Max</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of World</td>
<td>P: Hobbesian/Kafkaesque</td>
<td>E: Lockean/Randian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Frequency of spite can be assessed, for example, by relation to number of social stress responses per unit of time (ex. US. 200 sr/day). Further discrimination can be produced between spiteful and non-spiteful social stress.

Among others, one important consequence deriving from the above description, is again consistent with classical analyses, in this case, Stuart Mill's (Mill, J. S., 1859/1999). In non-interferential social-political worlds, the pursuit of fitness maximization leads individuals, like in any other ecosystem, to the discovery and exploitation of new niches: in this case, socio-economic niches. Therefore, at the level of the economic structure, there appears a process which is co-extensive to economic growth, namely specialization of economic action. Consequently to the specialization, exchanges take of: exchanges being the modality par excellence by means of which individuals take possession of resources with high marginal utility for them, by giving away resources which for them have very low marginal utility. At the level of social structure, the exploration of new niches leads to diversification, to differentiation and variation of life strategies and lifestyles. In the terms of the present analysis, the maximization of fitness is achieved by a more optimal exploitation of existing resources and by the continuous invention of new types of resources. The pursuit of fitness maximization is less frictional, since individuals need less to rely on extracting fitness from others, spiteful fitness destruction included (Boari, M., 2005b).

It is here that we discover the logic of Mill's eulogy of difference. Difference is not a mere idiosyncratic preference: it is the preference for a world more rational and less "Kafkaesque" (sociopathic). The contrary can be observed in worlds where coercion is used in order to shape/limit the paths open to maximizing fitness. Individuals tend to agglutinate on the paths left open to them. Competition on the few open paths arrives at exceeding the capacity of that respective path of action to secure the fitness of the individuals. It is by necessity that the use of spiteful strategies in view of the elimination of competitors will prevail. Such worlds are less secure, less safe, more confrontational, aggressive and dangerous: at a level of subdued violence, which episodically explodes in overt violence (that which is called rebellion, insurgence, uprising, revolution, coup, etc.). Individuals take risks in order to "steel" fitness one from another and this is done most effectively by the association with the coercive agency (the state). Politics is that which determines the fortunes of one's life, and not whatever productive activity one might choose to undertake. Such worlds are less rich in alternatives, and also more homogenous, uniform and intolerant of difference. The rationale lies with the fact that the adoption of a common identity makes one less visible, less conspicuous and, thus, less susceptible of predacity on behalf of organized groups. It is here that we find the rationale of the crowd behavior and of the processes of massification which were so characteristic of the XXth century. 20

If we designate the worlds in which the “economic means”, therefore in which strategies of differential fitness maximization of type E are prevalent, as E Worlds, as opposed to P Worlds, whereby strategies of differential fitness maximization of type P prevail, a synoptic capturing of the structural differences will look like in the figure bellow:

By way of conclusion, the essence of the discussion above is to be captured in the following theorem: the larger the system of political/social/cultural constrains regulating the pursuit of fitness maximization, the larger the reliance and the prevalence of spite and of its socio-psychological and existential correlates.

As a matter of fact, in the theory hereby exposed we find the explanation of a process often noticed in political science with puzzlement: why state power seems to increase, no matter what the system of checks set on it. Coercive monopolistic power is the outcome of the spiteful drives in individuals, each concerned with controlling the growth and the increase of fitness of others, more than being concerned with the increase of their own fitness by independent means. In different words, individual's most important business is the business of others, and the effective means to achieving control is an overwhelmingly coercive monopoly. Society thus becomes a battleground between factions organized in order to utilize the coercive machinery to their advantage: unionization, regulation of professions, licensing bodies, differential taxation and redistribution, etc. When the fitness maximization of individuals is capped, the only alternative remaining is the minimization of fitness in others. And when an agency exists endowed with suitable power, this path will necessarily always be taken. The increase of state power is a runaway process finding its origins here.\footnote{French society, which I had the chance to observe during the past several years, is a perfect illustration for this paragraph.}

It is one of the ironies pertaining the functioning of the human mind, telling in itself, that discourse and facts are more often than not in a relation of opposition. Thus
it happens, by way of a final application of the theoretical apparatus hereby espoused, that the factual dominance of structured, institutional spite in a world correlates inversely with a public ideology which emphasizes its opposite, altruism or other pro-social emotions. While the reciprocal also holds true.\textsuperscript{22}

**Figure 10. Application: The Ideology - Spite Correlation**

![Graph showing the correlation between altruistic ideology and spiteful fitness appropriation]

3. Some implications for the theory of rationality

"[...] A more profound understanding of the tools of procedural rationality demands a more precise exercise of the modes of functioning of the human mind and of the limits of human rationality" (Herbert A. Simon)\textsuperscript{23}

The former chapter responds to Herbert Simon's urging. So far, analyses of the limits of rationality were carried from an isolated cognitivist angle, obeying to the spirit of a metaphysical tradition which disjoints rationality from the facts of man's empirical existence. During the first half of the XIXth century, a quiet revolution occurred in philosophy when, in the aftermath of the Kantian demonstration of the impossibility of metaphysics, Arthur Schopenhauer linked rationality to the unsurpassable fact of man's empirical, biological existence (the "representation" respectively the "will"). He had full awareness of the turning point that he established in philosophy but, to this day, this has seldom been recognized.\textsuperscript{24} As if the Schopenhauerian Kehre would not exist, he is comfortably classified by professors of philosophy among the "irrationalist" philosophers (which can be due to the influence he had on Nietzsche).\textsuperscript{25} For Schopenhauer, the intellect, the mind, rationality, in one word, is subservient to "will", which is synonymous with the force animating all life (and, actually, the entire universe, but this is more than we need here). His conception

\textsuperscript{22} See note 21 above.
\textsuperscript{24} Schopenhauer, 1859/1966; 1850/2005 for example, p. 483.
\textsuperscript{25} For example, see Mueller, J.-L., 1970.
will later inform the vitalist trend in philosophy, Bergson in particular. The essential idea, transposed in contemporary terminology, is that reason is a byproduct of the biological processes. Even though Schopenhauer and Darwin were contemporaries, Schopenhauer never saw Darwin’s importance, and the thinking of Schopenhauer, albeit biologically minded, is clearly not evolutionary. However, in the light of the knowledge available today, it is the biological evolutionary account of rationality which will expand our understanding of the topic.

The biological angle offers a qualitative perspective upon human rationality. There is a rationality of destructiveness and I exposed here its biological underpinnings and its phenomenology. But this rationality merely marks the boundary whereby economics, ethics, as well as any human constructive effort, ends. The caveat of the conventional model of the rational maximizing individual is that it merely assumes that individuals want/can/should keep in check the spiteful part in them. This assumption, besides being a necessary simplification, it also contains an undisclosed axiological component. Therefore, and in different words, the model of the rationally maximizing individual is already normative, prescriptive: an ethical construct. Rational maximization means that individuals are considered responsible for acting so and it expresses also a trust that they can and will choose to act so. As a matter of fact, historically, the idea of the rational individual has roots in the late medieval/early modern debate on free will: choosing to be rational reflects the knowledge of the good and of the evil, as well as the capacity to do the first and combat the second. It expresses confidence in the creative, inquisitive and productive capacities of man.

This theoretical stance has been consistently a determining assumption of economics: “Economics is the human science which celebrates human rationality in all the forms in which it manifests in human behavior and in the workings of human societies. […] Economics […] draws a romantic, almost heroic a portrait of the human spirit. […]” (Simon, H. A.1961/1991, p. 53). But not only as a logical assumption, should we add, but also as an act of faith.

The preceding analysis of spiteful behavior clearly delineates the territory of the classic theory of rationality which, in this light, appears to be not merely a cognitivist theory, but also an ethical theory. As a matter of fact, this fact has not gone unnoticed in the work of apologists of economic rationality, such as Ludwig von Mises or Ayn Rand. It also indicates that, at a fundamental level, there exists a necessary link between Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, the first making explicit that which the second contains implicit.

The relationship between reason and human nature has represented a cornerstone of the early modern theories of economics and politics. The alleged insufficiency of human rationality has led authors such as the skeptical David Hume and, especially, the authoritarian Hobbes to supplement it with coercion: for Hume,

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26 Schopenhauer died one year after the publication of the *Origin of the Species* (1859). It is an intriguing fact that, while being the informed philosopher he was, the emergence of the evolutionary thinking completely escaped Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer quotes twice Erasmus Darwin, but on marginal considerations related to sensation/vision, in his *Treatise of Colors* (Schopenhauer, A., 1816/1986, pp. 33, 45). As to Charles Darwin, the only reference I know of is from a letter: “I have read a large excerpt from Darwin’s book [Origin of Species] in Times: […] this works has nothing to do with my theory. It’s just plain empiricism, altogether insufficient in the matter, a pure variation on Lamarck’s theory” (Letter to von Doss, March 1, 1860, cited by Eduard Sans in his “Introduction” to the French PUF edition of *Will in Nature*; Schopenhauer, A., 1836/1986, p. 31; my translation from French).
herein lies the origin of government while for Hobbes, herein lies his recommendation of the absolute sovereign power.\textsuperscript{27} If the analysis hereby proposed is correct, this solution is wrong, and together with it, the overwhelming political theory and practice thereby ensued, in particular the trend of political economy which denounces free enterprise and which was dominant since the end of the XIXth century till today. The premise of a Hobbesian view is that the irrational passions and drives of men, pushing them to destruction, can be countered by force: which itself represents a threat of destruction. In other words, irrationality countered by irrationality. Ingenious methods have been invented in order to keep under control the new irrationality thus introduced, that of the state and of the political power: constitutional safeguards, the division of powers in the state, the mechanisms of checks and balances, the theory of representation, the limitations of mandate and the cycling of power, the party factional system, etc. All these exist for a reason. And their rationale consists in the extreme danger represented by an agency acting on spite on an exclusive, monopolistic basis.

As a matter of fact, reacting spitefully to a potentially spiteful action does not require any special science; it is rather common folk psychology. A science of politics can truly begin precisely by an understanding of the natural reactivity to which humans are prone, an investigation of its effectiveness at the scale of populations and the derivation of objective principles which may or may not be in accord with common sense. In the case of irrationality, the restraint of spiteful behavior by means of coercive power has the precise opposite effect: it increases the frequency of spiteful responses and rearranges their distribution between different types. Humans normally can make the difference between two situations: when their drive to fitness maximization is restricted by objective circumstances (limitations inherent to the ecosystem), versus arbitrary circumstances dictated by the coercion imposed upon them by others. They will react mostly rationally to the first set of contingencies, and spitefully to the second set.

The Hobbesian political philosophy is a theory of restricted self-preservation, that is, a theory based upon an implicit ethics of sacrificed desires and renounced autonomy (sovereignty). The second paradigm-setting political theory of modern times, namely John Locke’s, assumes that humans are sufficiently rational to pursue their own lives, only occasionally arriving at conflict. Accordingly, the size and the attributes of the political power are drastically reduced and restricted, most of the behavioral regulatory functions being performed via economic exchanges on a free market. The explanation of Locke’s assumption is to be found in the preceding section. Insofar as no arbitrary limits are set to the autonomous, active search of

\textsuperscript{27} For Hobbes, reason cannot produce the wisdom needed in order to follow these laws. It is this insufficiency which leads to a renunciation of individual sovereignty, and the institution of the sovereign power. The power invested in the sovereign is proportional to the deficit of rationality and equal to the absolute character of the laws of nature which it must apply (Hobbes, T., 1651/1996, [88], p. 21 ff.).

A rapport between desires and reason determines at Hobbes a certain configuration of the sovereign power: Hobbes's Leviathan is the Absolute State. A different rapport, beneficial to rationality, has lead to the second great political theory of Modern times, namely the minimal state of Locke (Locke, 1690/1960).

For Hume, Treatise on Human Nature, Book III, Of Morals, Section VII, On the Origins of Government, pp. 534 ff.: "... our passions [...] always plead in favor of whatever is near and contiguous" (534); "Here then is the origin of civil government and society" (537); "Magistrates, kings and ministers] are not only induced to observe those rules in their own conduct, but also to constrain others to a like regularity and enforce the dictates of equity through' the whole of society" (idem).
niches and strategies of constructive maximization of fitness, the frequency of actions performed in view of this result by means of destroying fitness of another are rare. They are, simply, more costly than the existing alternatives.

4. Ethical implications

"The more every man endeavors and is able to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his own being, the more he is endowed with virtue" (Spinoza)28

a. Endo and exo psychological correlates of the dynamics of fitness

The automatic regulation of the level of fitness makes the object of homeostatic mechanisms yet to be described, if indeed such mechanisms exist. What is certain, on the basis of cursory empirical observation, is that individuals do have an awareness of the homeostasis of fitness in the form of general psychological tonicity, subjective perceptions, emotions, mood, rationalizations expressed as preferred maxims, etc. Which moral maxims one pursues (and it should be stressed, pursues, that is, as they reflect and actualize in one's actions, not merely in discursive form), is thus a manifestation of deeper seated mechanisms, and not a matter of arbitrary choice, "influence", indoctrination, formation, etc. Even though these last factors do have a role to play, this role has been over-estimated consequently to the blank slate hypothesis and of the voluntarist-constructivist character of social sciences, an observation coming from social scientists themselves, and from evolutionary theorists alike.29

Maximization of fitness is reflected in conduct as drive to achieve. In its turn, the drive to achieve takes opposites forms, depending on conditions already discussed, among which crucial is the level of coercive fitness limitations/controls.

When the individual remains autonomous, the drive of fitness maximization expresses itself at the level of action as self-exertion, self-realization or, in the pejorative form almost consecrated in political science, as "acquisitiveness" (McPhearson),30 or greed, as Marx had it. At the level of rationalization, the drive thus expressed takes the form of an ethics of work, constructivism, productiveness, such as in the accounts of Weber or Rand. The correlated existential philosophy is one predominantly optimistic.

Maximization of fitness differentials in conditions of autonomy is expressed as emulation. Emulation is the autonomy equivalent of envy: spite, the willingness to diminish the fitness of another, remains latent, since other, less costly, modalities exist for increasing the fitness differential to one's advantage. The correlated rationalization of emulation is an ethics of merit. A meritocratic worldview is thus the outcome of autonomy and independence, whether achieved due to generic political permissiveness or by particular ontogenetic circumstances. In this sense one may succinctly state that free market and capitalism convert envy into emulation, spite into exchanges.

Probably the most important correlate of autonomy is a state of confidence and self-esteem. Achievement, being an expression of fitness efficacy, represents a major reward mechanism for the brain: it is as if the brain confirms that "one is doing well" from the point of view of survival. In its turn, self-esteem echoes in the relations with others in the form of tolerance and cordiality. Self-esteem correlates positively with elevated levels of serotonin, which is considered to be the "self-respect chemical". It also correlates with elevated levels of dopamine and endogenous opiates (neuropeptides) which mediate the circuitry of pleasure. It is likely that some sort of monitoring system exists in the brain, such as positive fitness evaluations (understood relatively, that is, by means of social comparisons or by relation to independent criteria and standards) trigger the reward mechanisms and the associated emotions: pleasure, happiness, satisfaction.

Autonomy tends to stabilize behavior: that which is commonly termed "character", since there is less pressure on individuals to adapt to the unpredictable shifts in the rapport of forces which plagues a climate of dependence. In general, it brings about the outline of personhood and of a clearly defined self. According to hermeneutic approaches, the self is a "cultural" construct (Taylor, C., 1989). More exactly, it is the result of frequency distributions of spiteful versus productive behavior between individuals. The self is the result of moral growth, of slow sedimentation of rules of thumb guiding one's conduct in respect to others: process which in spiteful environments is unlikely to be achieved. Among these, are the traits which characterize responsibility: the capacity to keep one's promises and perform his/her contracts, foremost. According to Kohlberg, principled action in regard to another is the final stage of moral development, not always actualized (Kohlberg, 1981). Individuals may achieve biological adulthood but not ethical maturity: which explains the infantilism and moral underdevelopment perceived in oppressed, spiteful worlds.31

Albeit we do not know the intricate details of the mechanisms involved, holistically, the machinery involved in the assessment of relative social fitness has been recognized since the beginnings of philosophy: it is the second part of the Platonic soul, the thymos. Thymotic emotions are related to self-assertion and the demand of recognition placed upon others.32 In conditions of autonomy, self-assertion is associated with self-respect and achievement. Therefore, the assertive claims do not need to be over-emphatic, exaggerated; thus, they are less likely to irritate and to stimulate moralization and cognitive falsified representation (cognitive dissonance) in others.33 There exists an element of objectivity in any alleged superiority, which makes both its manifestation and reception, contestation included, milder and more principled: in a word, less spiteful and less irrational. This capacity for self-objectification is the crucial part of an ethics aware of its infrastructure (via self-consciousness).

In evolutionary theory, two forms for the expression of fitness are described: the form in which the expression matches the objective fitness, termed honest signaling, versus the form in which the expression merely imitates, without there being the "real thing". The second is termed dishonest signaling (Zahavi, A., 1974, 1993; Grafen, A., 1993). Dishonest signaling is the essence of deception, as modality for organisms of faking their relative rapport of fitness. In a world which is plagued

31 Kaplan, R. 1993, esp. part 2; Coustine, A. de, 2002; Rand, A., 1936/1996.
by thymotic assertiveness, deception and dishonest signaling are the rule. To the contrary, in worlds based on self-exertion, whereby real achievement objectifies assertiveness, honesty and related ethical traits will prevail.

There exists supportive historical evidence that lack of political freedom is accompanied by high levels of assertiveness and spite. Marx thought that the proletarian revolution will take place in the most advanced nation, England, while it took place in one of the most servile nations of the time, Russia. Russian nihilism, both doctrinal/philosophical and political, remains one of the purest illustrations of spite, as reflected literarily in the work of a Dostoyevsky or a Cernishevsky, and doctrinally in those of a Nechaev or Lenin. When combined with assertiveness, spite produces that form of behavior known since the ancient Greeks as hubris. In hubris, the utility of harm done to another, resulting in favorable fitness differentials to self, is accompanied by the pleasure of destruction. By that, hubris represents spite entered the domain conventionally delineated as sociopathic or psychopathic. Hubris represents a complete reversal of the neurostructure, in which impulses normally associated with shame, regret or, in the least and more generally, with a need to deculpabilize, become sources of pleasure, pride and boasting. Within common psychology, hubris accompanies vengefulness and punishing modalities.

Hubris is the normal companion of the most spectacular brands of tyranny, making thus visible the causal affinities between spite and political power (Xenophon, Kojeve, A., Strauss, L., 1954). But these limit cases are less useful as mere anecdotal curiosities or spectacular exceptions. Instead, it would more useful to understanding that they illuminate mechanisms which operate more or less obviously in any world in which milder forms of spite have a high frequency.

b. Normative ethics

Ethics remains a normative non-coercive discipline. However, ethical maxims are injunctions which can easily be turned into orders and commands, that is, into a coercive discipline. Politics which turns morality of any kind into compulsive enforcement, from prohibition laws to anti-abortion laws, from compulsive redistribution and welfare policies to enforced substantial equalitarianism is, has been, and will be one of the most pernicious processes in human societies. The only justification of ethical injunctions can be that of making human life a better one: but one cannot be forced to better off according to the views of another.

In order to prevent such an outcome, a couple of things are helpful. On the one hand, a prescriptive ethic should follow from as accurate a description of how things are as possible. The relationship between the description and the prescription will make visible the difficulties and the problems of the implementation. One particular such problem, is the cost to individuals, in terms of fitness maximization, of a given ethical prescription. If the cost is too high, the probability of conduct according to the recommendation will be small, and the likelihood of diversion large. If there is no payoff, again, the likelihood of the prescribed conduct is negligible (provided that enforcement does not occur). Ethical prescriptions during the centuries of institutionalized religious power are a good illustration for the combination between

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35 Demosthenes, 2004, Against Konon; Against Meidias; Aristotle, 1924, 1378b: "Now slighting is the actively entertained opinion of something as obviously of no importance [...] There are three kinds of slighting: contempt, spite and insolence [...]."
coercion and payoff (in the form of the promise of afterlife) for the enforcement of otherwise improbable behavior.

To decide which ethical prescriptions are desirable, is less difficult a job than one might think. From an evolutionary perspective, the intellect of man, like of any other creature, is subservient to its own survival (and we have here an illustration of the brilliant insights of Schopenhauer). Therefore, the rationalizations produced, including ethical maxims, will serve, via a direct or a convoluted path, the interest of survival and fitness maximization of the body whose brain makes the rationalization. In an example proved countless times in history, an ethical prescription which glorifies sacrifice, always presupposes some masters whom are enforcing the sacrifice. Being a master, whether deriving the benefits thereof or modestly restraining to the mere enjoyment of power, is a form of fitness maximization, and any form of mastery is precisely that. The sacrificial component presupposed by an ethical system is a qualitative but reliable index of the potential of its coercive transformation. Therefore, a criterion which must become central in the evaluation of ethical systems is their minimalism in what the preservation and the fitness of individuals is concerned. If an ethical system fails this test, then its source must be in spite and not in some generosity regarding human condition (Boari, M. 2005c).

The desirability and the feasibility of an ethical system derive from the correctness of its description of the factual reality. From this point of view, and by way of an illustration, the most general Christian maxim, "have done unto another as you would have it done unto you", is incorrect due to its factual component. The maxim presupposes, much like classical political economy, that human action is necessarily driven by a positive self-interest. But since spite can determine people to act against their own self-preservation, the universalization of this rule will lead to a world of generalized spite. People would theoretically accept sacrifice upon the condition that it is infringed upon everybody else: again what matters is that differential fitness be kept at a minimum, and not the level of some absolute maximal fitness.

For related reasons, the Kantian metaethical rule, namely that every ethical maxim should be universalizable as a test of its feasibility, is insufficient since spite can be, and often is, a universalizable norm of conduct - but its results are hardly ethical. The specific difficulties of his categorical imperative when shed in an evolutionary light are too complex to be discussed here.

The criteria of universalization, considered so far a necessary and sufficient condition for the validity of an ethical system, is rendered insufficient by the existence of spiteful, irrational behavior. The criterion is still necessary, but not sufficient. An "unless" clause seems to be a second necessary component of an axiomatic foundation of ethics. In different words, it seems to me that an ethical system is a binary one. Or, which is formally equivalent to the above, the application of ethics, the validity of ethical maxims, is restricted to a well delineated domain of human action: outside of this domain, ethics is out of question.

c. Normative ethics of rationality

This "well delineated domain" is the domain of rationality. This is a consequence deriving from the description proposed above of spite as fundamental

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behavior. As I shall indicate, it is also consistent with the classical and early modern understanding of ethics, in general, and in particular, of the idea of "virtue".

To be a fundamental behavior means that spite, irrational destructiveness and the correlated emotions (hatred, envy, pleasure at the loss of another, etc.) are present in every individual. Careful discriminatory analysis would reveal the existence and the extent of spiteful motives in all our actions. Therefore, it is out of the question the "elimination of spite". Fictional explorations of spitelessness, of which the most famous is Stanley Kubrick's Clockwork Orange, end on a disturbingly cautionary note. The issue is that of limited, controlled spiteful action, not of spiteless action. To put it differently, it is an awareness of spite and a discrimination of when and how to use it. This, in my view, is the backbone of ethics. And this is not a power that could lie outside the individual.

Limitations of spite from without are perceived by definition as spiteful themselves. One should remember that spite is a means of increasing fitness: actions carried by third parties in view of its limitations have as effect a reduction of the fitness of the targeted individual. As such, they will trigger corrective responses, both productive and spiteful, depending on the degree of autonomy of the individual concerned. But to be under the injunctions of others, indicates precisely a lack of autonomy. Therefore, the responses to limitations of spite from without will be themselves spiteful: the typical "doomsday machine" scenario of escalation which could be controlled only in the conditions of overwhelming difference of power. Leaving aside the pragmatic issue of efficacy, this scenario does not qualify for the context of a discussion on ethics.

If we circumscribe the domain of human action which is not spiteful, destructive and self-destructive, and we give it the name of "rationality", by opposition to spite, destruction and self-destruction described as irrational, then an ethics prescribing action within these confines is an ethics of rationality.

Rationality presupposes a creative circumvention of the tendencies of spiteful action. Rationality thus means a. the capacity to self-observation b. the capacity of self-control and c. the capacity to discriminate between spiteful versus constructive means for achieving fitness maximization (the difference between "good" and "evil"). Translated in the domain of existential guiding rules, an ethics of rationality would prescribe:

* autarchy, autonomy, self-sovereignty and self-sufficiency
* hedonism
* objectivity, self-consciousness

These three recommendations are linked one with another and derive one from another. Equally, they are the natural consequence of the practice of rationality, not some pious sentimental sermonizing or strenuous impositions, to become either coercive or ineffective.

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37 "The most simple, impartial observation of the self, associated to the conclusions of anatomy"; Schopenhauer, A., 1850/2005, p. 448.
38 "An irrational and even blind will [...] is at the basis and is the root of every intellect"; Schopenhauer, 1850/2005, p. 463.
39 Which is the dream of any spiteful individual, as illustrated in the paradigm of invisibility, from Plato's Gigeres to H. G. Wells and Tolkien.
There are three components of the ethics ensuing from the practice of rationality: by that, they meet the requirement of minimalism discussed above. Besides, they are intricately linked to the universal human desideratum of happiness.

In the outline above, is captured in a nutshell the essence of the Western tradition in ethical thought. All the great moments of Western philosophy of human nature linked ethics with rationality, via one component of it or another. The nexus virtue-rationality-autonomy-happiness is almost universal. Setting down some landmarks may be useful.

When Socrates was praised by his contemporaries for his wisdom, he placed the responsibility on his daimon, a quasi-entity residing in his head, which did not give any specific recommendations of what Socrates should do, but merely what to abstain from doing. Socrates' daimon is his consciousness, his moral consciousness. In order for such a consciousness to be obtained, one has to develop the capacity to objectify him/herself: which is to say, to gain the perspective upon the multiplicity of forces acting within oneself and to take an impartial stance towards them. Moral consciousness is based upon self-consciousness, self-objectification, in a word, upon self-knowledge. The Delphic path to wisdom presupposed only one maxim: "know thyself" and, out of it, all other things derive, justice foremost.

The just man is a happy man, Socrates proposes to his collocutors at the beginning of the dialogue The Republic. Further, justice (and thus happiness) arises from the cultivation of the nous, the rational part of the soul. In the same dialogue, Socrates maintains the apparently counterfactual thesis that one should rather have an evil deed done unto him/herself, than to be the doer (Plato, 1986). The rationale appears quite clearly in the light of this paper: wrongs done unto us merely presuppose a loss of utility, while wrongs perpetrated by ourselves, actions based on spite, are self-destructive, they presuppose and bring forth the capacity to act against the very core of one's instinct, desire and goal of self-preservation.

For Aristotle, whom originated the ethics of action, autarchy is the main virtue and the precondition to happiness. Autarchy means to give one's own principle of being, one's own law. The autarchic man understands that the cause of one's happiness should be found in oneself: otherwise, the objects and the others create dependency (Aristotle, 1915).

The classical concept of virtue was one of excellence of the self (arete). The rational part in man being the highest, the cultivation of rationality meant to strive for a superlative condition. All humans act on instinct and emotion: to act on reason, was setting one apart, and made of oneself an exception. It was a challenge to bring about possibilities which are universal in human condition, but which are seldom brought about to actualization. Ethics, thus, appears as an exploration of territories not yet known, an exciting and uncommon endeavor: far from being a tedious catechism of pious intentions which no one believes, ethics is an adventure full of excitement, challenges and rewards.

I know of no better illustration of the classical ethics of rationality than Cicero's late treatise On Friendship, which sets this exalted concept of the individual pursuing his/her superior part in relation (Cicero, 2004). Friendship, as the superlative form of inter-human interaction, exists precisely in view of virtue. Two individuals become friends because of love of the excellent part in themselves: and they remain friends because they help each other in getting ever closer to virtue. Friendship is emulation in view of virtue. Cicero brings together the Platonic noetic man and the Aristotelian autarchic man in a quintessence to mark the decline of the classical age.
But this sense of excellent individuality was recaptured at the onset of Modern Times, with the rediscovery of the classic antiquity and of the ideal of man which it proposed.

During the Renaissance, and acting like a manifesto of it, Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* ecstatically took notice of the potentialities of man of whom he thought that has no prescribed nature (Mirandola, 1486/1991). Today we know that man has a nature, but this does not change the character of potentialities. Rationality represents an open system of, indeed, infinite possibilities, but built upon a closed, finite system of biological potential. An understanding of the second is a precondition to the realization of the first. The ethics of rationality is an ethics of exploration and actualization of that which in principle is possible, once one has refused the irrational. Ultimately, the ethics of rationality is a discipline of creativity, productivity, and a non-fatalistic stance towards the arbitrary products of natural selection. To the blind competition dictated by biology, the ethics of rationality gives sense, purpose and meaning, making thus of it a competition in view of virtue.

Repeatedly, in the works of modern authors, there appears an accrued consciousness of the fact that a sort of distancing, a separation between individuals is a precondition for the achievement of any ethical high ground.\(^40\) Aristotle's concept of autarchy is given new and richer meaning. In Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, we find a first sample of criticism of human sociality which can be effortlessly read in sociobiological language: it is the critique of the four idols preventing humans from seeing the truth, from achieving objectivity. The idols of the tribe, of the cave, of the marketplace, of the theater are, respectively, a critique of human nature, of subservient, imitative sociality, of group prejudice and blind submissiveness to authority.\(^41\)

"I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions": thus ends the first paragraph of the *First Meditation on First Philosophy* of Descartes.\(^42\) We find in it, capture in a nutshell, the entire deontology to discovering the truth but, more generally, to a steering of the self in the direction of rationality. Ethical ("sincerity", "devotion"), epistemic ("without reservation", the canceling of prejudice, of Bacon's "idols"), thymotic ("demolition") and sociological ("alone") considerations are intertwined in one phrase which can be as well the paraphrase of the entire modernity. Descartes philosophical meditations are not merely the precondition of the philosophical/scientific search for truth, but also of the existential adventure of man in discovering him/herself.

The most lasting expression of the nexus autarchy-happiness-virtue is to be found in that pinnacle of the Enlightenment, and of the rationalist Western philosophy, which was the work of Immanuel Kant. The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* establishes the relationship between will-reason-autonomy-freedom as the precondition to the categorical imperative and, thus, as the essence of ethics: "The true vocation of reason is to produce a will that is good"; "Autonomy is

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40 In general, the theory of rights and liberties achieve this condition of separateness. The history of the enclosure of commons in England was the practical reflection of the trends in theory.


42 Descartes, R., 1641/1984, p. 12.
therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature"; "Autonomy of the will [is] the supreme principle of morality [...]; Heteronomy of the will [is] the source of all spurious principles of morality"; "The concept of freedom is the key to the explanation of the autonomy of the will".43

The classical ideals of excellence understood as rationality, were to be historically and politically captured in the foundation of the American Republic.44 In Jefferson's work, in particular, we find them captured in his compelling formulation of the natural rights individualism, of his trust in reason and the superlative part in man (Jefferson, T., 1999). Hegel saw quite clearly that the American Republic is, quite like no other in history, part of the process of the objectification of Reason: "America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the world's history shall reveal itself [...] It is for American to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself. What has taken place in the New World [...], in regard to Philosophy [...] [has to do] with [...] Reason". (Hegel, G. W. F., 1840/1956, pp. 86-97).

There appears that, both via an empirical/deductive path, and via the cumulation of philosophical pronouncements from the history of Western thought, a condition of in-dependence of the individual is central to a normative ethics of rationality. Autarchy is the personal, subjective-existential dimension of the said condition; while autonomy can be understood as the public, social and political dimension of it. They both define the sphere of individual liberty: subjective, inner freedom, respectively objective freedom, which is foremost economic freedom, the freedom to preserve oneself maximally. The first dimension, is private, the sole affair of individuals concerned; the second dimension is the one which is of interest to a normative theory of ethics, and as well to political economy.

The condition of autonomy is primarily an ethical category since it captures precisely the moral discriminating power between right and wrong, good and evil, by means of independent judgment, assessment, evaluation. On such basis, independent action can be performed: therefore, the individual subjected to imitation and conformist/gregarious behavior becomes truly individualized and separated. The condition of separateness from the group, from the species based behavioral infrastructure, is a moral condition: there cannot be any discussion of morality except by this process.45

As an immediate consequence, the condition of autonomy is a political category since its dynamics closely matches the amount and structure of coercive control over preservation exerted by some individuals over others. There is no autonomy when one's actions are penalized and/or rewarded according to the will of third parties. Autonomy and power are inversely correlated.

Thirdly, and not necessarily in this order, the condition of autonomy is a biological category since it relates to an individual's capacity - or lack of it - to preserve oneself at levels of maximal fitness. It then depends on the coercive social

45 A maxim of the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica has been with me since an early time: "A man is what remains of him/her after the others have demolished him/her completely".
context in which s/he finds him/herself whether s/he will fulfill this goal by him/herself or with costs to another. In different words, it depends on whether this goal has any bearing on ethics or not.

Fourthly, the condition of autonomy is a hedonic category. From Aristotle to the Declaration of Independence, autonomy is linked to the pursuit of happiness by individuals. Being linked to the maximization of self-preservation, it cannot be other than so: pleasure and happiness being mere subjective indicators of a program of fitness maximization well pursued.

Fifthly but not lastly, by virtue of being linked to self-preservation and to a hedonic condition, autonomy is an economic category. Economic action is the only means of maximizing fitness unspitefully, which is to say, rationally and also ethically.

In numerous accounts, the unavoidable normative dimension of ethics refers to the obligations of an individual towards others, towards some collective noumenal entity, such as "society", or towards some transcendent entity. The "others" have been the primary focus of ethics during the XXth century. But this is a matter of mere historical contingency, the XXth century being an age of gregarianism and collectivism, whereby human individuality is set in the service of this or that. But since the known beginnings of Western philosophy, ethics has been a theory and a discipline of individual rationality.

The underlying notion of the above argument is that the individuals have obligations uniquely towards themselves and whatever occurs in the space of their interactions with others, is a consequence of this obligation, and an indirect effect.

The principle of the rational maximization is in truth a principle of maximization of rationality in the individual. Maximizing means, in this context, to make the most for yourself by making the most of yourself. The emphasis in the notion “rational maximization” falls upon rational: which is to say, maximization by rational means. It implies resistance to the apparent facility of spiteful, irrational emotions; also, it presupposes inventiveness and imagination, in order to obtain a maximization of fitness differentials by more complicated and productive means than undermining another. Therefore, the principle carries with it a rich potential of ethical creativity, is a source of material wealth and of social intelligence (Boari, M., 2005c).

As a mater or fact, and insofar as spite is also self-destructive, rational maximization carries with it the connotation of love of life: not indiscriminate love, which includes the oxymoronic love of destruction, but the preservation of life. Rationality is preservationist and the ethics of rationality is an ethics of care.

According to some accounts which follow a Hegelian thematization, modernity is nihilistic. Nihilism carries with it two dimensions: on the one hand, the dimension of negativity, which is quite a complex topic (Boari, M., 1998). Human beings do have a large capacity to negate, including themselves. But in the original Hegelian account, negativity presupposes something added to that, since otherwise it could not be differentiated from destructiveness. This second dimension of negativity is precisely preservationist: humans negate in order to uplift, in order to bring about richer potentialities in the negated object. The term for the Hegelian negativity,
considered by some as a defining feature of modernity, is *Aufhebung*, to negate and to overcome. It is the fine line between the two distinct strategies of fitness maximization which makes the difference between the nihilism ascribed by critics to modernity, and the preserving negativity hereby described. The rational man is indeed, as Heidegger wanted it, the "shepherd of being". A maximizing agent is ethical precisely because s/he is acting with a view to that which is absolutely maximizable, and not merely relatively so. By this very fact s/he acts in the sense of an enrichment of the possible, and not merely in view of a redistribution of that which already exists. It is of secondary importance whether the drive is conscious or unconscious. But it is likely that the difference in styles of action will become, sooner or later, perceivable and conscious to the agent.

Figure 11. Analytical Decomposition of the Ethics of Rationality

Rational maximization thus entails an ethics of care, primarily a care of the self.\(^\text{48}\) Maximization of fitness, when *rational* (emphasis added), has little to do with the incandescence of emotions such as greed, "acquisitiveness" and the like. It is not a decerebrated, neurotic endeavor to secure everything indiscriminately. Rational maximization is of fitness and, being a form of self-care, takes fitness into account in all its aspects. Three of these aspects are worth discussing. The first one, concerns the relation between fitness and natural endowments and, consequently, between fitness and self-consciousness and identity. The second and the third, concern the distribution

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\(^\text{48}\) Originally a notion of Michel Foucault, "le souci de soi". The notion is related to that of Rousseau of "amour de soi". In English, it is amenable to the interesting distinction between "self-love" and "love for one's self", which presupposes that a "self" exists.
of fitness over time and in relation to productivity. These are the forms of rational maximization of particular interest in the context of political economy.

Fitness is rationally maximized in qualitatively differentiated modalities. There exists, on the one hand, an equilibrium between generality and productivity: in different words, a maximization of fitness imposes some degree of specialization. On the other hand, fitness is maximized selectively: among the many variables along which one can maximize fitness, some are simply under-represented in an individual, others are less well represented and yet another group represents the true assets of individual's fitness. In different words, it is in the interest of an individual's fitness to know what is possible for him/her, and from what is possible, what ought to be out selected. This presupposes awareness of one's natural endowments, therefore self-consciousness, power of self-objectivation and self knowledge. Secondly, this presupposes processes of choice, sometimes cognitively and emotionally difficult choices: one would like to become an athlete but one is not endowed for athletic activities. One would equally be able to do well in hard sciences and in the humanities, but reduction of generality imposes a choice.

This process of self-interrogation and, at the same time, definition of one's identity, takes place automatically, since individuals maximize automatically. What may differ is the resolution of the process and the disturbing influence of socialization: extended family, peer group, political availability of options.

The importance of this point overcomes the focus of the present study, but it must be at least indicated. In one influential political theory, that of John Rawls, redistribution is justified by the quite compelling argument of the "veil of ignorance''. In brief, since individuals have no pre-existing knowledge of their future positions, it would be rational for them to favor a redistributive principle. This absence of knowledge may be true in what concerns social positions: but fitness positions are quite clear for individuals on the basis of the self-examination of their natural assets, endowments, qualities (early social feedback is also a factor, but forbidden by Rawl's model). Fitness position is well correlated with social position in liberal, meritocratic worlds. Therefore, on the mere basis of fitness appraisals, individuals can make accurate predictions of their future social positions. The adoption of a redistributive principle of justice is not at all necessary. Things are different if one assumes that political/cultural constrains distort the correlation fitness positions/social positions. This is the unexplained assumption of the Rawlsian model: the model is valid only if one assumes by necessity coercion. Therefore, it is not ignorance but the expectation of coercion that which makes the adoption of the redistributivist principle likely. Redistributive justice preference correlates with the expectation of coercion, therefore of a high frequency of spiteful intercourse.

The distribution of fitness over time takes the form of life-long management of fitness. Existentially, this gains expression as questioning and ruminations about how to use one's life, self-inquiry into the abilities, faculties, preferences of activity, etc. As observable from the description itself, these are concerns of an individual whom assumes to be in control of his/her life and whom does not question such an assumption. From the perspective of this rational approach, the notion that life is mostly adaptive and that behavior is mostly response to whatever stimuli the social environment produces makes no sense. The life management approach is the approach of an autonomous individual, and its dynamics is function of the coercive control of

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fitness from without. In environments which regulate and order from outside individual's life, this concern for the maximal utilization of one's life remains incomplete or, when persistently pursued, is experienced as alienating (or neurosis inducing), since the decisions of individuals about his/her life are continuously interfered with and collided by coercive molding from without.

Finally, rational maximization of fitness by relation to productivity entails taking into account criticality: provisioning for situations of reduced fitness. Typically, these are situations of unproductiveness due to sickness, unemployment, old age. These are also the three typical forms of compulsory state insurance, the heart of the welfare state since Bismarck onwards. Considering the Humean and the Hobbesian theories of government mentioned above, what we are dealing with in the case of the welfare state is a transfer of rationality from the individuals to the state. Thus, individuals are deprived of the major impetus for both learning rationality and developing responsibility for their own existence. The attribution of "infantilism" and immaturity becomes thus transparent. The welfare state impedes rationality by providing disincentives for the development of rationality in individuals. The situation has been discussed as early as the XIXth century by Tocqueville, when he foresaw the advent of a tyranny unknown in history: not a tyranny of terror, but a tyranny of provisioning "from the cradle to the grave" (Tocqueville, A. de, 1840/1990). Both forms of tyranny originate in spite, considering their crippling effects upon individuals: even more so the tyranny of benevolence which takes fulcrum and exploits the weaknesses of individuals and their tendency to avoid hardship. Appeasing hardship, the Etat providence deprives them of the essence of their humanness. Insurance arrangements, expression of individual's private sociality, ethical competence and intelligent provisioning for the future, all have taken the form of coercive arrangements. The theoretical discussion of Tocqueville will later find literary illustration in Aldous Huxley's distopia Brave New World, as well as in the philosophical transformations of the Hegelian thesis of the end of history.

Insofar as rational maximization of fitness is concerned, it is in the above that one finds the content of the notion of "making the most of one's life" and not in some sort of bulimia and insatiable appetite, as Hobbes wanted it, an infinite "desire after desire after that ceaseth only in death". As a matter of fact, since the crucial homeostatic device for assessing fitness differentials is comparison with others, most individuals imitate and copy whatever system of prestige signals have currency at the moment. In this respect, Hobbes's theory of desire, so central to his political science, ultimately may not be correct, with all that this entails for the political philosophies and practice based on his ideas.52

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50 A somewhat naïve but moving attempt to read the contemporary welfarist world in the vein of Tocqueville and Huxley has recently come to my attention: Rufin, J.-C., 2004.
52 This idea has been recently suggested to me by a re-reading of Ayn Rand's Fountainhead; Rand, A., 1943/1952, pp. 598-9.
Figure 12. Fitness Maximization in the Rational Individual

→ Fitness is rationally maximized in qualitatively different ways.
Three components are crucial:

• Fitness by relation to natural endowment
• Fitness by relation to lifespan
• Fitness by relation to productivity:
  ▫ unemployment
  ▫ illness
  ▫ old age

→ Rational fitness maximization is in fact the management of the individual’s life

One perspective upon Western modern times, an essential one at that, relates closely to the topic of this paper, under the form of a several centuries wide polemics concerning liberty. Somehow both sides of the debate tacitly agree on one important point, best captured in the work of Thomas Paine, namely that among many possible definitions of civilization, the one which is crucial links civilization to the liberty of man (Paine, T., 1792/1999). The polemics has been captured synthetically by a landmark essay of Isaiah Berlin as the opposition between a negative concept of liberty, whereby liberty is the absence of imposition, coercion, interference, intervention (liberty from); and a positive concept of liberty, which is prescriptive either in a non-coercive or in a coercive format (liberty to) (Berlin, I., 1969/1992). Attempts have been made to overcome the final character of this opposition, by introducing a third form of liberty (liberty from dependence), with little success in my opinion, but not altogether worthless (Skinner, Q., 2001).

The apology of negative liberty is difficult to attack, unless one does not support overt or dissimulated coercion. Its weakness lays precisely in the absence of a prescriptive but purely non-coercive component. The advocates of positive liberty conceptions, whatever their style, share a concern about how the individuals will use their unsullied negative liberty. The advocates of negative liberty are concerned by arbitrary interference by would-be dictators of goals.

I believe that the concept of rational maximization of fitness, as it has been exposed here, escapes the major caveats of the two conceptions outlined above. On the one hand, it is evidently based on the negative concept: autonomy discussed throughout the paper means precisely freedom from interference, regulation, control and any form of intervention in the will of the individual. On the other hand, the prescriptive component derives from the absence of interference. It is precisely this absence that will bring about the prescriptive component, as a result of the individual’s own deliberations, reasoning, choices, learning.

Views related to the above are not altogether absent from the theories of negative liberty. What the present proposal brings new, is the absence of its pretension of universality. The account hereby exposed presupposes that the development of an ethics of rationality is necessary in conditions of liberty, albeit not universal. It is necessary in view of its links with the biological principles underpinning human action. It is not universal because spite is a fundamental form of

53 Albeit the distinction was first made by Kant; Kant, I., 1785/1996, p. 94-5.
54 There exists some marginal affinity between the conception hereby exposed and that of Skinner (Skinner, Q., 2001). However, the relationship is merely superficial, and its explanation would be inappropriately long in this context.
behavior, biologically determined. However, as discussed previously, liberty leads to an increase of the frequency of rational maximization in any given population. In one sentence, spite is necessarily overcome, but not universally so.

This fine distinction, which makes of rationality a necessary but not universal process is also that which defines the territory of ethics.

5. The limits of ethics

The domain of rationality encompasses actions in view of fitness maximization which exclude the reduction/destruction of fitness in another. Actions of this second kind carry with them the willingness of an individual to reduce/destroy his/her own fitness, with the mere result of reducing the fitness differentials. This self-destructive component, whether actually present or only latent, is that which gives spiteful actions their unmistakable flavor of irrationality.

Thus, ethics is defined by, and limited to, rational engagement. There cannot be an ethical intercourse when confronted with irrational actions of oneself, or of another. In normative/practical terms, this general principle takes the form of three rules of the type:

1. A rational individual cannot engage ethically in actions directed against his/her rational self-preservation (non-spiteful self-preservation).
2. A rational individual cannot engage ethically but another rational individual.
3. A rational individual will remain within the boundaries of ethics when responding rationally to the actions of a non-rational individual.

The first rule prescribes the reflexive ethical relation of individuals with themselves. It can also be expressed in the form: it is immoral for an individual to perform actions whose result is a diminishment of his/her fitness (such as self-enslavement), or condone actions of others with the same result (coercive restrictions of his actual or potential actions in view of fitness maximization).

An example may be in order.

In accordance with the first maxim (and also consistent with methodological meta-rule of minimalism), individuals cannot be under any obligation to maximize the fitness of another with costs to themselves: to the contrary, they are under the ethical obligation to stop exerting themselves, would the results of their efforts be spitefully appropriated by third parties, for their own use, or for the benefit of yet another fourth party. Would they not stop exerting themselves, they create the preconditions of coercive reduction of their own drive to fitness maximization: therefore, they would help destructive action of others directed to them.\(^{55}\)

Anecdotally, this is no mere abstract theory. An empirical illustration of the countless paths which structured, organized, spite can take and its intricate participation in common social reproduction, can be taken from the case of a transitional economy such as the Romanian one. For more than a decade both the political powers and the intellectual class (indifferent of their ideological flavor)\(^{55}\) Compare with Rand, A., (1987), ch. 11, "The Mind on Strike", pp. 389-482, especially 398. The basic idea is the same: individuals must "go on strike" in a morally corrupt society.
accused "the Romanians" for lack of entrepreneurial spirit and lack of willingness to work. Both camps seem to have forgotten that Romanians were under heavy taxation and redistributive laws, meant to keep alive a huge state apparatus and its dependents, not to mention the ubiquitous theft from public funds, carried under legal and illegal arrangements. Far from being irrational, Romanians did the only rational and moral thing possible, namely to refuse to work since the results of their self-exertion were coercively appropriated from them. There is no rationality in working when mostly everything is taken by others: to the contrary. Government officials and intellectuals, most of them associated with the state, are the direct beneficiaries of the work done by others: moralistic injunctions, sophistic rationalizations and coercion all concurred in expropriating individuals from the product of their own exertion: for the material benefit of the "moralizers", combined with their thymotic profit of preserving easy control over a dependent population. The same intellectuals and technocrats were then accusing Romanians for an "etatistic mentality". The appropriation of another's labor is selfish; but the purposeful reduction of another's autonomy is strictly spiteful, because it eradicates the very preconditions of fitness maximization for this other. And, in the case above, politicians and intellectuals were prepared to do it even with a reduction in their own absolute level of fitness.56

The second rule effectively limits ethics to relations between rational agents. It basically states that there are no ethical relations except for those occurring between rational individuals. Irrational actions exclude one from the realm of ethics: being malicious, spiteful, destructive, amount to a statement of enmity, a state of war. This rule has already been formulated by John Locke, in his Second Treatise on Government. On the one hand, the rational defines the right: "God gave the World [...] to the use of the Industrious and Rational (and Labour was to be his title to it); not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious" (291). Secondly, the rational defines the area of moral obligation: " Such Men are not under the ties of the Common Law of Reason, have no other Rule, but that of force and violence, and so may be treated as Beasts of Prey [...]", (279).57 The Lockean rule stays at the basis of the common theory of the legitimacy of self-defense and, related to it, of the later libertarian principle of the non-initiation of aggression, as sole required moral obligation (Rothbard, 1998). The relationship between the libertarian principle and the normative ethics hereby sketched are too complicated to be discussed here. However, I should mention that in terms of form, it satisfies the meta-rule defined previously while in terms of content, it is subsumed to the obligation of rationality that individuals have towards themselves: by definition, a rational individual (that is, a spiteless individual) will not initiate aggression. The notion of spite is more encompassing and less defined than that of aggression: it is from this difference in the conceptual coverage that delicate difficulties arise, but this is not the place to discussing them.

Would an individual choose not to respond properly to spiteful actions, s/he would act unethically according to the first rule. But if s/he chooses to respond, a more subtle difficulty arises: how could s/he avoid his/her response itself be spiteful,

56 The present discussion must leave aside, for now, the prickly problem of the ethical character of suicide. Apparently, suicide contradicts this first rule and, thus, cannot qualify as ethical. In brief, the solution lies with the principle that suicide should not be spiteful which does preclude suicide in self-defense, as when the individual is challenged by overwhelming spiteful circumstances. This is the case with the stoic suicide or, in general, with the philosophical suicide.

57 Locke, J., 1690/1960, p. 291, 279 respectively.
that is, originate in hatred and vengefulness, in the desire to harm? In different words, how is it possible that the response to a spiteful action, remains ethical?

It is here that the third rule occurs. The third rule is a rule of retaliation. Spiteful retaliation is irrational itself and, thus, triggers "doomsday machines" of escalation of destructiveness. Insofar as the response remains rational, it also remains within the boundaries of ethics. What does it mean for the response to remain rational?

The problem is co-extensive with (but more encompassing then) the modern problem of the rationality of punishment. In pre-modern times, punishment was hubristic, a spectacle meant to set in stage the power of the sovereign, to awe and dissuade by the massiveness of the fear induced in the spectator. That is why punishment was also a public event.58 Modern penal reformation was carried precisely with a view to the issue of the rationality of the punishment: and it took the form of measurement and proportionality (Bentham, J., 1781/1988; Beccaria, C., 1764/1986).59

An important point revealed by the modern reformation of punishment which can guide the present discussion was that rationality is calculative. Whence we can deduce a rule of thumb in what concerns retaliation: insofar as a response to an irrational act is calculated, it still is within the boundaries of rationality and, thus, within the limits of ethics.

Retaliatory calculus is a genus, within which retaliatory punishment is a species. The genus comprises also the species of containment and the extremely prickly species of preemption. On the other hand, the dimension of calculus, albeit being necessary for the preservation of the rational and, thus, of the ethical character of the response, may not to be also sufficient. Apparently, calculus can also be based on spiteful emotions, case in which they take the form of "cold" hatred or vengefulness, by opposition to the normal "hot" character of such behaviors. At the bottom of this problem, there remains the yet inextricable nexus enunciated by Kant: a will which remains good, as the true vocation of reason (Kant, I., 1785/1996, p. 52).

However, there is a crucial difference between cold calculative spite and calculating with one's own spiteful drive. We meet here the parameters of maximizing rationality discussed formerly: the self-consciousness and the self-objectivation of the agent. In relation to one's daimon, one is alone. The calculation with one's spite is probably the last stage of an ethical dynamics. At the bottom level of ethical conduct, there is deliberation, not rules, axioms and principles: but an ongoing dialogue and struggle between humans insofar as rational creatures, and the biologically evolved infrastructure of their species. The lowest limit of ethical conduct remains thus open.

And this is as it should. As discussed formerly, the ethics of rationality is a tendential progression towards a geometrical ideal: it is the movement which matters, not the arrival at some predetermined spot. The ethics based on rational maximization, whose content I tried to elucidate here, is such a movement.

6. Final remarks

More than a mere convenient epistemic simplification, the rational maximizing individual is a concept constitutive of Western civilization. I tried to

58 For example, see Foucault, M., 1977.
59 For an interesting discussion of retaliation, in connection with the distinction rational/irrational retaliation, see Nozick, R., 1981, pp. 363-397.
elucidate in this paper why this is so and, indeed, why this should be so. The expression which this principle has taken in economics is merely the most visible one. And, indeed, it should be so, given the fact that economic science is the science of the rational self-preservation of man. What are the causal relations between capitalism, as historical embodiment of this science, and ethics, I have shown elsewhere (Boari, M., 2005c). What are the causal relations between rational maximization and ethics, I tried to show here. Between modern economic science, the theory of rationality and ethics there appears to exist a triangular relation in which the terms support and mutually enforce one another. Together, they produce the invisible scaffolding, the infrastructure expressed in countless anonymous opinions, beliefs, motives and values which made up the modern West. Capitalism is not a generic form of human action: it is action in view of rational, free fitness maximization (Boari, M., 2005c). As such, and if the present argument is not totally wrong, it is a precondition of ethical development. Just as Spinoza, quoted above, had it: "The more every man endeavors and is able to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his own being, the more he is endowed with virtue".

Between the two modalities of increasing fitness differentials, the first one, based on self-exertion and productivity is specific to economic action. During the XXth century, "This is just business" has been, both in high brow culture and in popular culture, used mostly pejoratively and capitalism was seen as rather a "necessary evil". The argument above, intends to change this view. Economic action, when free and uninterfered with, generates one of the least spiteful and most rational and ethical social environments. It secures maximization of fitness, with a host of derived desirable social phenomena: diversity, complexity, inventiveness, creativity, non-hostile competitiveness. Whenever the free market is interfered with, that is, whenever the autonomy of individuals is coercively molded, this fragile setup is destroyed. Individuals will shift their dominant strategies towards predacity of others or, even worse, towards spiteful destruction of their fitness. The social effects of this behavioral shift will not fail to appear: social decomplexification, destruction of diversity, homogenization, dishonesty, Byzantinism, hypocrisy, predatory and hostile competitiveness. By and large, this duality responds to the old distinction between economic means and political means for making a living (Oppenheimer, F. 1914/1997; Nock, A. J., 1935), to which the present study aims to give explanatory substance at a fundamental level. Meanwhile, the description of action based on spite and predacity, opens up the path to a sequel of Mises's theory of economic action, completing thus the picture of his praxeology (Mises, L. von, 1949/1966).

We can find numerous similarities between Western philosophy and other cultural worldviews, Oriental philosophy for that matter. But there is nothing similar to the concept of rational individual. The Indian philosophy has produced a morality of renunciation and detachment, result of the helplessness of man when confronting spitefulness, evil and sufferance. Confucian philosophy has produced an ethics of controlled spite, in which sociobiological relations, the family and the hierarchies of dominance, are conformistically enforced in view of their inevitability. In spite of some superficial contemporary vogue of Confucian ethics precisely in management, it

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60 Incidentally, an ethics fully endorsed and indeed developed into a concept of self-denial by Schopenhauer: which is why he cannot be present as landmark in this study; Schopenhauer, A., 1859/1966.
has produced political bondage and forms of economic stagnation out of which the most emancipated parts of this East attempt to escape: "If the XXth century was a century of organization, the XXIst century will be a century of the individual", spells out the report of the commission on Japan's goals for the XXIst century appointed to prime minister Keizo Obuchi in the year 2000.61 The West has produced an ethics in which individual's duty towards him/herself prevails and in which spiteful behavior is contained and overcome by the free, unhampered expression of maximizing self-interest.

In a philosophical rumination, the physicist Richard Feynman conjectured that "if in a cataclysm, the entire scientific knowledge would be destroyed, and only one sentence would be conveyed to future generations, [...] this would be the atomic hypothesis".62 Translating his musing in the realm of social knowledge, I believe that this singular notion would be MAXRAT, the principle of the rational maximizing individuality.

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