**Emotions and Judgment**

*Thinking is a form of feeling …feeling is a form of thinking.*

Susan Sontag

Much of life occurs with your body responding before you have a chance to think about the choices available.

When you are hungry the choice that you will eat is made before any deliberation about you will eat.

You move out of oncoming traffic.. can you think of other examples of when you act without deliberately thinking you have a choice.

You tend to operate on ‘auto pilot’ until our mind is focused by attention to something.

Yet there are times we spend hours deliberating and procrastinating in the pursuit of getting a decision ‘right’.

**Antonio Damasio** Professor of Neuroscience

Suggest two types of decisions:

1. High reason view of decision making on one hand
2. Somatic marker hypothesis

(Soma means ‘body’ in Greek. It is a bodily feeling either positive or negative) this feeling is experienced prior to making a decision and this somatic marker influences that decision.

**High reason**

High reason view values pure reason and logical deduction above all else. In order to obtain the best results emotions must be set aside (as they cannot be objectively validated0 and a pure ‘cost/benefit analysis’ must be calculated. This assumes that someone other than you can make a choice about your future.

**Exercise: Emotion and Judgment**

Before you begin consider these questions:

What are the criteria you will use to select your college or university?

What will be your major field of study and how will it influence your choice of instruction?

Is cost a factor and how will you pay for it?

1. List each of the colleges or universities and the areas of study you are considering.
2. Where are they located? Are they urban, suburban or rural? In warm climates or cold? Near to home or far away?
3. What are the academic experiences you hope to have and how do you know you can get them at your institution? What are the social experiences and how can you get them?
4. What is the faculty and curriculum?
5. List the benefits you hope to gain upon graduation from each institution.
6. List the cost of each benefit.
7. How do you know the benefit outweigh the costs?
8. When you have made these deliberations, rank your choices from most preferred to least preferred.

Sue Bastian. (2008) *Theory of Knowledge*: Pearson p64

The exercise should have demonstrated that if the power of pure reason is the only thing you use you will spend a significant amount of time on it.

You need to isolate the academic and social experiences – how do you value them one against the other.

How do you determine the cost of a benefit of a university’s curriculum and weigh it against an as yet unknown future value? – you may not recognize the benefit of a superb institution until many years after graduation.

**Why is it hard to make a decision?**

The weight of details of gains and losses will fill you mind and you will be able to attend to each of them and recall them. Consequently you will postpone your decision until it is too late.

The high reason method of decision making does not allow you to consider questions that do not have rational answers. However most of the time we are not reduced to reason alone particularly in relation to important decisions.

**Somatic markers hypothesis**

‘Gut’ feelings – though not always aware of them help us make decisions. Damasio calls them ‘somatic markers’. They are somatic because they are about the body and markers because they mark an image. These gut feelings come before you apply any cost benefit analysis. Your attention focuses on possible negative consequences of a decision and has raised an alarm. This may not in itself be enough to reject it but will bias your choice. If the somatic marker is strong enough it may lead you to immediately reject the contemplated choice . At times this could remove you from danger but will also eliminate a possible alternative.

*In short somatic markers are a special instance of feelings generated from secondary emotions. Those emotions and feelings have been connected by learning, to predicted future outcomes of certain scenarios. When a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination functions as an alarm bell. When a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead it becomes a beacon of incentive.*

From Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain by Antonio R. Damasio, Vintage.

If attention is focused by emotions and if emotions occur before thought emotions could be a precondition for our thoughts. They could be essential valuing mechanisms programmed by evolution to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Emotions frame our conscious awareness such that we rationalize our choices after we make them.

We can override our emotions – this is what happens when we use will power. Without an emotional input we would be vaguely meandering through rationality without coming to a decision.