

# A WORLD IN TWO MINDS

Why we must change our thinking  
to change our future

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# Introduction

A FEW YEARS AGO, after yet another news bulletin consisting almost entirely of stories of conflict or catastrophe, I began to wonder if there is a deeper explanation for why our world seems to be in such a mess. When we are such social animals, why does it seem to be so difficult for people to live together in peace? With so much wealth, why are we unable to ensure that everyone at least has the bare essentials of food, water and shelter they need to survive? Why can't we strike the right balance in providing sufficient of life's luxuries today, yet still stop short of damaging the only planet capable of sustaining human life in the future? Why, when almost all of the issues afflicting people worldwide are ultimately man-made, does our species seem to be so intent on inflicting great damage upon itself? Why does global human society seem to be fragmenting as it simultaneously seeks to integrate, and why does it intuitively feel like we are building towards some sort of crescendo which could potentially be catastrophic?

Fuelled (as I would later discover) by a distinctively human degree of delusional self-confidence that I could actually answer these questions, I set off on a long journey which would eventually produce this book. Along the way I have discovered that we are all deeply embedded within what scientists call a 'complex adaptive system' consisting of a whole array of other such systems, including every human-being, every other animal and every single plant on the planet. As if this wasn't complex enough, all of our individual attitudes and behaviours are driven by one of *the* most complex of all such systems – the human brain. So, nested like Russian dolls, these systems all interact with one another, the larger systems exerting downward pressure on their sub-systems, the smaller systems exercising upward influence on the larger systems of which they are part. Through these interactions we effectively co-create the environments we share at every level of our existence. At each level, the interpenetration of individual minds produces a collective mind we might call culture, which becomes crucial when we discover that over 90% of all our

thinking is unconscious to us. Schematic memory and our embodied senses contribute to our unconscious cognition but culture also plays a huge role in bringing forth the conditions we create. Culture colours the lens through which we see the world and therefore shapes what unfolds, either by strengthening a dominant worldview or by swimming upstream to offer an alternative perspective. Much of the chaos we are currently experiencing is the result of worldviews which are changing, clashing and competing for global dominance.

Part One – Seeing – *The Shifting Sands of the Human System* explores how culture is both created by and helps to shape human societies, explaining how it is perfectly possible for the contrary operating modes of the brain hemispheres to create cultures which are cognitively imbalanced, contributing to the poor mental health of individuals within them. It also investigates the source of this sickness, identifying the three competing worldviews at the root of global conflict. Finally it considers the characteristics of all complex adaptive systems, especially the two at the heart of this book – the individual human mind and the collective global mind; the latter arising from the interpenetration of the former. In particular it focusses on how complex adaptive systems change by self-organizing to the ‘*edge of chaos*’, an optimised transition space in which cascading waves of change can evolve such systems to higher levels of coherence and good health. Global human society currently finds itself at the *edge of chaos*, offering great opportunity for a transformative shift towards peaceful integration but just as likely to result in catastrophic breakdown. The future we bring forth will ultimately depend on how we choose to see the world and on our ability to change the way we think. Unfortunately, there are many features inherent to our 200,000-year-old brains which make this a significant challenge.

Part Two – Thinking – *The Modus Operandi of an Ancient Brain* explores how the human brain works, in particular the opposite yet complementary modes of the right and left hemispheres. While we all use both sides of our brain all of the time, we can and often do develop a preference for one mode over the other so it’s possible for larger groups to become similarly dominated. Part Two further explains the features of our ancient brains which undermine our ability to cope with the increasing complexity of the 21st century, exposing the many foibles, fallacies and flaws in our cognitive equipment. All outer-world manifestations of human thought originate in the brain and Chapter 7 explores how our liberal impulses are the product of the right mind, while our conservative

tendencies are created by the left mind. Our political polarities are direct outputs of the opposing modes of the mind, and our personal persuasions the result of our preference for one mode or the other. Globally the culture of scientific materialism, although still dominant and dangerous, is being progressively undermined by a more liberal outlook, leading to increasingly aggressive militarism as reactionary elites seek to consolidate their power bases. However the increasing democratization of data is weakening their grip, emboldening ordinary people to seek greater levels of self-determination. The political, economic and spiritual structures which have scaffolded scientific materialism and the Abrahamic monotheisms are slowly being dismantled, offering the potential to rebuild them from the bottom up. However, overcoming their influence, the damaging effects of social anomie and our deep resistance to change, all present major challenges.

Part Three – Learning – *Origins and Oscillations of a Global Mind* reviews how scientific materialism came to dominate global society and traces the swings in cultural influence of the left and right mind. For over 95% of our existence we lived in egalitarian societies and worshipped ‘earth mother’ deities, only inventing ‘sky father’ gods around 6000 years ago. The advent of patriarchy sent each gender down dual pathways which would lead to differences in the cognitive preferences of men and women. Patriarchal societies ensured the cultural dominance of the left mind, dissociating human-beings from the valuable influence of the right mind, denaturing the human condition and severing the physical, spiritual and social synapses which made people feel whole. Scientific materialism dominated the modern era, reaching its zenith with two World Wars and the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan. Post-modernism has since deconstructed the modern mind, leaving it fragmented with no clear way forward. Yet, within this intellectual maelstrom an Eastern-influenced ‘organic’ worldview has been growing, and the wide openness of post-modernism offers a potentially fertile soil from which healthy balance could emerge in the global mind. Only the organic worldview can deliver such a synthesis but is our species smart enough to bring forth this outcome?

Part Four – Growing – *Pitfalls and Possibilities at the Edge of Chaos* considers the critical role of consciousness in achieving the coherence required for global human society to elevate to higher levels of harmonious integration. It explores both scientific and spiritual perspectives of consciousness and the degree to which scientific materialism has suppressed

our thinking. Only by reconnecting with the right mind can we regain higher consciousness to reconcile science with spirit in whole-mind synthesis. The widespread adoption of the organic worldview is critical to achieving global coherence, yet it still struggles to gain mainstream acceptance due to the adversarial nature of scientific materialism and the major monotheisms, which can never be reconciled in their current form. Only the organic worldview can achieve reunification by radically reshaping how we perceive both science and spirit. Changes to the global human system require genuine democracy and restructuring can only grow from the bottom up. The most vital changes must be made to economic capitalism, which must be counterbalanced by increased social, moral and human capital to moderate its most pernicious effects. There is no single *'silver bullet'* solution for healing human society but increasing the influence of women is the best option we have for accelerating the harmonious integration of our species. The root cause of our crisis is ultimately the dominance of the left mind in global culture, which continues to be exacerbated by the pre-eminence of men amongst societal elites and the outdated *'boy code'* to which male children are still raised.

However, the legacy of being inadvertently allocated primacy of by far the more powerful brain hemisphere has better prepared girls for the future. The right mind will provide the core capabilities required in an increasingly integrative culture and will give women a cognitive advantage as computer software progressively replicates our left-mind functions. Women therefore have a big role to play in bringing forth a positive future but the benefits for men are also huge, enabling them to become more whole human-beings. The future we collectively create isn't pre-ordained and we are now reaching a level of global interconnectivity where smart technologies can act as social synapses, sending cascading waves of change across the human system. Each of us is just a tiny node in a gigantic network but we all have a role to play and any one of us could be the catalyst which tips global human society into a new age.

Writing this book has been a long personal journey during which I've learned a lot about how the world works and, in particular, about the species of which we are all members. Understanding the many flaws in the human brain is both fascinating and frightening but if becoming more aware of our own inadequacies can make us all a little more humble and respectful of each other, it will be worthwhile. Individually we are not nearly as clever as we like to think, yet the world we create will inevitably unfold as the result of how we all think and act. What surely gives us hope

is that we can actively shape life, mostly in small, local ways yet which, at the right time, could cause seismic shifts across the whole human system. The right time is now. Life at the *edge of chaos* may be uncomfortable but it also offers great opportunity for our species.

Today, people everywhere are sensing that our world is becoming more dangerously disordered yet perhaps without being able to clearly see why. With this book I hope to help readers join the dots between apparently disparate events in the outer world and throughout human history. The simplest way to understand the vast complexity of the global system is the obvious, yet easily overlooked, fact that everything human-beings create ultimately originates in the human brain. By comprehending the contrary cognitive processes which underlie all human behaviours, in particular those which cause conflict, we can better understand different cultures while making their characteristics more relatable through our experience of our own minds. By appreciating the opposing modes of the two hemispheres, their many flaws and the inadequacies of the cultural structures they have created, we realize that such structures don't *have* to be as they are and can be changed, just by thinking differently.

I also hope to encourage readers to become more conscious of their own thinking and more active in changing the world we live in. By making modifications which increase our own inner coherence, while proactively seeking outer coherence, we can all make a contribution towards the greater systemic coherence from which global peace and individual happiness may emerge.

I hope you enjoy it.

## Our Self-Inflicted Sickness

**I**N THE 5th century BC, Socrates concluded that he was wiser than all of the eminent Greek scholars and philosophers who had gone before him, because he alone recognized his own ignorance. That this observation is simultaneously boastful yet full of humility, illuminates the key characteristic of the human brain which lies at the very heart of this story; its amazing ability to reconcile contradictory concepts. As we will discover, the power of opposites is essential to how we process and experience the world around us every day. While Socrates perhaps possessed one of the sharpest brains ever to produce thought, the 1.5 kilograms of neurons, glial cells and blood vessels which is enabling you to read this sentence still shares this same characteristic, and many more, with the great mind of Socrates and with every other human-being who has ever lived. Those of us alive in the 21st century can now benefit from the accumulated knowledge of all the great scholars who preceded us, from the Western genius of Aristotle, Galileo, Copernicus, Da Vinci, Newton, Darwin and Einstein to the Eastern brilliance of Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zarathustra, Al Khwarizmi, Avicenna and Omar Khayyam. If, through the wonders of modern technology, we now have access to most of the philosophical, scientific, economic, mathematical, astronomical, geological, sociological, anthropological, theistic and literary output ever created, the mind of the average modern human must surely be more knowledgeable and infinitely wiser than the famous polymaths of history. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work like that! In spite of having the whole history of human development behind us, the intellectual ability of each individual doesn't appear to have snowballed since the time of Socrates. Given everything we now have the capability of knowing, why aren't we all smarter than Da Vinci?

The reason is twofold. First, in the modern world we simply don't need

to know everything. Our ancient ancestors, when they shifted from hunter-gathering to farming, had the bright idea of dividing labour so that each individual could specialise and didn't have to master, or even participate in, all the tasks which needed to be performed. It was this social skill – the ability to communicate and work co-operatively with strangers for mutual benefit – which first allowed humans to grow beyond small family groups into the national and international communities we are all part of today. Now, there are billions of us participating in all manner of pastimes and professions, each often requiring very particular cognitive capabilities, and we have not only learned to divide our labour but also to divide our knowledge. Indeed, many of our economies are now primarily knowledge-based and, with so much information available and so many different ways to apply our skills, we have all become accustomed to only learning a very thinly sliced portion of everything there is to know.

However, there is a more fundamental reason why each of us can only retain a few drops of the ocean of data available to us – we are still operating with essentially the same brain as the very first *homo-sapiens*, around 200,000 years ago. While the information available in the outer world has expanded exponentially, our internal ability to process the data we receive has failed to keep up. In this new age of high-speed broadband, digital technology and global connectivity, we still have the same cognitive equipment our ancestors had when they first discovered fire and invented language, so it is perhaps no wonder that each of us can only grasp a microcosm of what we could understand with a more capable brain. We are no smarter than Socrates because our mental tools are no more advanced than his were. Indeed, such is our overconfidence as a species that, even with an additional two and a half millennia of learning, we are often less appreciative of our own ignorance than he was.

Our overconfidence manifests in many ways, one of which is our habit of telling ourselves delusional but comforting tales which reduce any distressing cognitive dissonance we might be experiencing. On this basis, we might be tempted to convince ourselves that only we 'mere mortals' are cognitively challenged. Since large human communities were first created, they have been ruled, not by the ordinary populous, but by a political, academic, religious or commercial elite, which remains the case to this day. Armed with aeons of knowledge, surely our modern societal leaders must be individually smarter than Socrates and collectively wiser than all of the great scholars of antiquity? The state of the world we live in should quickly dispel us of any such notion.

## A World in Chaos

These days, global human society seems to be in perpetual turmoil. A review of any 21st century newsreel would feature the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Centre towers in New York on 9/11, the hostile occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the re-emergence of a nuclear threat in North Korea and continued tensions between Israel and Palestine. We have seen the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen and the crushing of demands for democracy in China and Nepal. We've witnessed genocide in Somalia, civil war in Syria and the Ukraine teeters on the brink of implosion, inflamed by Russian interference. The United Kingdom has voted to 'brexit' the most successful customs union ever created and the President of the United States openly condones extreme right-wing, white nationalist groups. A terrorist group has created an Islamic caliphate straddling the border between Iraq and Syria, violating human rights and committing medieval atrocities on a daily basis. People are drowning in the Mediterranean as they try to escape these warzones, and the international humanitarian response to the refugee crisis has largely been lamentable. According to the United Nations almost 60 million people worldwide – one in every 122 humans – have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of persecution, conflict or human rights violations.<sup>1</sup> The tragedies reported in our media have become so prevalent that we are almost numb to their meaning. The massacre of school children by the Taliban in Pakistan was quickly followed by the slaughter of thousands by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Charlie Hebdo murders in Paris, police brutality on black civilians in the US, tourists shot on a Tunisian beach and the bombing of a shrine in Bangkok, all blend into a cacophony of carnage. Every single day new tales of human suffering unfold around the globe. A 2014 study by the Institute for Economics and Peace found the world has been becoming less peaceful every year since 2007, and that only 11 of the 162 countries covered by their research hasn't, in some way, been involved in conflict during this period.<sup>2</sup>

Not only are we killing each other, we are also damaging the only planet in our universe capable of sustaining the human species. There is widespread consensus among the international scientific community that our methods and emissions are having a negative impact on our environment. Global warming, the increase in the average temperature of the earth's air and ocean water, is a proven phenomenon and greenhouse gases, resulting from human activities such as deforestation and the use

of fossil fuels, are significant contributors to it. There is broad alignment behind the prediction that temperatures will continue to increase well into this century, with significant implications for food supply, the survival of natural habitats and the availability of fresh water. At the 2009 Sustainable Development Conference, the UK government's chief scientist Professor John Beddington warned of an impending 'perfect storm' of food, energy and water shortages by the year 2030. He predicted that demand for food and energy would increase by 50% and fresh water by 30%, largely as the result of a growing world population which will top 8.3 billion by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

In the developed world we have a surplus of food, yet are eating ourselves to death. Health-care resources are stretched to breaking point as a growth in heart disease, diabetes, cancer and stroke, result from increasingly sedentary and indulgent lifestyles. In developing nations poverty remains endemic, with many governments unable or unwilling to ensure the controls required for sustainable economic development, which could give every person access to their basic human rights of sustenance, safety and shelter.

The citizens of many countries continue to be racked by the after-effects of the 2008 global banking crisis, as governments implement widespread austerity programmes to reduce spending and shrink national debts and deficits. Even in some of the richest economies, inequality of wealth distribution has led to 1 in 4 children being brought up in poverty and, each week, thousands of families rely on charity food banks to survive.<sup>4</sup> Many people face the prospect of unemployment as an increasing number of jobs are off-shored to foreign workers, who are able to replace their labour at a fraction of the wage they would need to maintain their current standard of living. Many others are anxious at the speed of technological development, enabling human muscle power to be replaced by machines which can perform faster, and for longer, than their finite energy resources could ever deliver. Even knowledge workers are increasingly finding that their capabilities can be easily replicated by computer software, against which they cannot compete. Those still in employment are working harder and for longer hours, delivering greater productivity per head for progressively less pay, as businesses down-size to cut costs while increasing profits, enabling directors and shareholders to disproportionately benefit from their collective efforts. As inequality grows in an ever-shrinking world, economic migration is an inevitable outcome, increasing the pressure on societies to assimilate different cultures.

As the pace of social change quickens, most people feel compelled to

try to keep up; making more choices, more quickly from a bewildering array of options, all communicated in a technology-enabled deluge of information they don't have time to digest. Many find themselves under pressure to not only make a living, but to generate an income which allows them to compete with peers for the latest gizmo or gadget, as well as meet their children's demands that they must do likewise. Under such social stresses many are driven into debt, some turn to crime, others to substance abuse. Suicide rates are increasing and strains on relationships have driven divorce rates to between 40% and 70% in many developed nations.<sup>5</sup> With weakening family bonds, yet desperate for anchors of stability, many people have no idea who they can trust – the credibility of traditional institutions, like churches and banks, having been shattered by scandal and mismanagement. As politicians cut social safety nets, while feathering their own nests with taxpayer-funded expenses, the elites of society are finally being fully exposed for what they are – ordinary human-beings, with the same flawed brains as the rest of us.

For many ordinary people, life in the 21st century feels like living permanently in the midst of a hurricane, so we are on solid ground to say that the elites who run our world are certainly no smarter than we are. It is equally clear that their strategies aren't facilitating peaceful global integration and that the social pressures produced by their policies, are not conducive to human health or happiness. Socrates believed that all human-beings, by their deepest nature, pursue their own happiness and thought that this could only be achieved through heightened self-awareness. Perhaps if we could understand what actually makes us happy, it might prove to be rather less elusive.

## The Source of Our Unhappiness

The 2013 World Happiness Report, conducted across 156 countries by the World Health Organization (WHO), concluded that our average global happiness rating was only 5.2 out of a maximum potential score of 10.<sup>6</sup> These measures vary by region and country. North Americans were happiest at 7.1, followed by Western Europeans at 6.7, while sub-Saharan Africans were least happy with a score of only 4.6. The least happy amongst us, the poor citizens of Togo, returned a despairingly low 2.9 out of 10 but, even for the top ranking Danes, a happiness score of 7.7 still seems like a fairly paltry return for two and a half millennia of post-Socratic self-discovery.

Other studies show that, even in the happiest regions, happiness isn't growing but declining. Not only are we becoming unhappier, we are also very bad at judging what makes us happy. We tend to overestimate the value of work, money and material possessions, while undervaluing relationships. The connection between happiness and money is complex. Overall, people in wealthier countries do tend to be happier than those in poorer countries, but the relationship between the two isn't very strong. In both the USA and UK, over long periods of unprecedented economic growth which brought great increases in personal prosperity, levels of life satisfaction didn't grow but actually declined slightly.<sup>7</sup> Nigerians rate themselves to be just as happy as the Japanese, even though their nation's GDP per capita is only around 1/25th of Japan's. Bangladeshis are twice as happy as Russians, although considerably poorer.<sup>8</sup> The picture is the same in Europe. According to Gallup poll data, Britons were happier in the 1950s than they are today<sup>9</sup> and a 2014 poll by the UK Office for National Statistics concluded that people in London, by far the wealthiest city in Great Britain, were more anxious and less happy than those in the rest of the UK.<sup>10</sup> Multiple studies across many countries show either a decrease or no change in wellbeing, despite an increase in prosperity, and that no causal relationship can be found between economic growth and happiness.<sup>11</sup> The consensus across all studies, about the relationship between wealth and happiness, seems to be that a minimum threshold is required for the basic foundations of happiness to be satisfied – such as food, clean water and access to shelter – but that, beyond such rudimentary requirements, there is little or no correlation between increased wealth and increased happiness. Studies by Easterbrook and Layard estimate that happiness levels reach a plateau at a fairly low level of income, between US\$10,000 and \$20,000 per annum.<sup>12</sup>

So if money doesn't make us happy, what does?

The WHO World Happiness Report found that positive mental health is the single most important determinant of happiness, and that as many as 10% of the world's population suffers from depression or some other form of psychological disorder – over 700 million cases worldwide. Furthermore, mental illness is a common occurrence in all countries and all regions of the world, with no significant difference between rich and poor nations. In August 2014, the death by suicide of the popular American actor and comedian Robin Williams highlighted that fame and wealth are no barriers to mental ill health. The WHO report also discovered that mental illness is massively undertreated everywhere. Even in wealthy

countries, less than one-third of those mentally ill were in receipt of any sort of treatment and no government spent more than 15% of their total health budget on mental healthcare, despite mental illness being a considerably greater cause of human suffering than physical illness. In poorer countries these statistics were significantly worse, with lower income nations spending, on average, only 0.5% of their total healthcare budget on mental health. In line with other studies, the WHO report confirmed that economic wealth played no role in creating happiness, beyond the minimum threshold we all need to provide sustenance, safety and shelter.

The World Health Organization places great emphasis on pointing out that positive mental health is not simply the absence of disease or infirmity, but a

state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

This includes the ability to learn, to feel and express a range of emotions, to form and maintain good relationships and to successfully deal with change and uncertainty. Happiness, therefore, isn't derived from simply not being sick. To be happy we must find the right balance between the intellectual, emotional and social tools we need to successfully interact with the outer world, to meet our goals and to deal with any challenges we encounter. Only these tools, employed in appropriate balance, can enable us to cope with and fulfil our potential in life. What constitutes the right balance will vary from person to person, but we all need to stay within a range of equilibrium to be mentally healthy. So, for example, someone who is too emotionally sensitive is more likely to experience the 'up-and-down' life which may lead to mental illness, while someone who isn't emotional enough, whether through detachment or suppression, is equally unable to access the full benefits of positive mental health.

A chaotic outer world can therefore be extremely damaging to mental health, because it challenges the ability of the human mind to sustain itself within a natural range of healthy equilibrium, and the fact is that almost all of our life stresses are human-made. While natural disasters or viral epidemics do occur, and negatively impact human life, such events are actually very rare. As a species, we can only continue to develop technologies which minimize their effect on us. However, the huge majority of our problems, from wars and environmental damage to unemployment and poverty, are actually inflicted upon ourselves by ourselves. Global

human society is ultimately the manifestation of human thoughts and feelings, because all of our actions must first originate in the human cognitive system – our embodied senses, nervous systems and brain structures. While it may be more obvious that our personal behaviour is the output of our own cognition, it is no less true that our collective actions, as a whole species, are ultimately the result of the collective thinking of all of us. While we may not wish to admit it, the communities, cultures and conflicts we experience, are what emerge when we put our minds together.

In short, we are making ourselves sick. The outer world chaos causing our major life stresses is ultimately the product of the same brains which are suffering self-inflicted mental illness, and making us unhappy. How is this even possible, when it runs entirely counter to evolutionary principles for any species to make itself ill? The answer lies in understanding consciousness, culture and complexity.

## Our Hidden Driver

We are deeply conditioned to believe that our thoughts and actions are the direct output of our consciousness but, over the last few decades, developments in neuroscience and psychology show that our behaviours are, in fact, predominantly driven by a much more powerful unconscious mind. Indeed, some scientists estimate that as little as 1% of all our cognition may be consciously processed, and most agree that it is likely to be no more than 10%.<sup>13</sup> At least 90% of our thinking may therefore take place beyond our awareness and, far from enjoying total free will, most of our actions are actually driven by automatic processes over which we exercise little or no control.

To grasp how this is possible we must consider the anatomy of the human brain, which consists of three overlapping structures, each of which evolved over millions of years. The oldest of the three, our reptilian brain, contains the brain stem and cerebellum and controls our body's vital functions, such as breathing, heart rate, temperature and balance. The 'thinking' that's required to constantly monitor these functions takes place automatically and unconsciously because we simply don't need to be aware of them, other than when something goes wrong. If there's an emergency, like a significant increase in heart rate or even something less dramatic like feeling too warm, our reptilian brain will alert our conscious mind but, apart from that, it just gets on and does its job without interrupting us. The middle layer, our limbic brain, evolved in the first

mammals and its main structures are the hippocampus, amygdala and hypothalamus. It is the seat of our unconscious mind, responsible for our emotions, intuitions and for capturing long-term associative memories. Our limbic brain is therefore the source of most of our thinking. Our neocortex is the newest, outer layer of the human brain and consists of six layers, formed into two distinct hemispheres. These hemispheres have been responsible for the development of language, abstract thought, imagination, spatial reasoning and our self-consciousness. When we think about thinking, it is therefore normally the neocortex we are thinking about. It is the source of everything we are consciously aware of, yet the fact remains that most of what we think isn't the result of our conscious free will, but is automatic and unconscious.

The content of the unconscious mind, the hidden driver of most of our behaviour, is unique to each of us and is formed by a combination of the genetic make-up we inherit from our parents, and the culture in which we live and grow. We are indeed formed by both nature and nurture. We share 99.9% of our DNA with all other human-beings and therefore inherit some traits which are common to all members of our species, such as the fight or flight response to danger and the automatic use of the same facial expressions to convey emotions such as fear, anger or disgust.<sup>14</sup> Other inherited dispositions may be more specific to us, influencing our early development and the type of adults we become in later life. For example, research suggests that high levels of sensitivity to sensory stimulus in babies, may be indicative of more introverted personality traits later in life<sup>15</sup> and that high levels of self-control, demonstrated as a toddler, may be predictive of good academic results as a teenager and career success as an adult.<sup>16</sup> Some of the factors which affect who we become are therefore predetermined through genetic coding.

Yet, while we are all genetically unique, the biological differences between us are actually quite small. Most of our attitudes and behaviours aren't hard-wired into us by genetics, but result from the values and beliefs taught to us by the culture in which we are raised. In *Guns, Germs and Steel*, his extensive review of the development of human societies, Jared Diamond concludes that environmental factors caused mankind to evolve differently, in various parts of the world, rather than any innate differences between *homo-sapiens*. Culture plays a significant role in creating the diversity between us – differences which are primarily ideological rather than biological – and is therefore the key determinant of the content of our unconscious mind.

Culture can be considered to be the aggregate of all the values, attitudes, beliefs, practices, habits and behavioural norms we use to regulate life in human societies. We embed culture in artefacts consisting of all of the systems, structures, processes, laws, symbols, artworks, architectures and institutions we use to define who we are, what we believe in and what we value. Through the constructs and conventions we create, we communicate to ourselves what we collectively consider to be right or wrong, good or bad and true or untrue about the world we live in. Through culture we tell ourselves stories about our past and make predictions about our future, and we use them to determine how we should behave in the present. Our culture tells us how to dress, what to study and what kind of career to pursue if we want to be successful in society. It tells us what to say and not say in different situations, when to laugh or cry, who to listen to and who to ignore, when to suppress our anger or reveal our empathy. It defines for us the boundaries of acceptable norms of thought and deed – such as how to treat animals, how our children should behave and what is acceptable practice in the mating game. Through the heroes our culture idolises, we learn about those human qualities we consider to be admirable and, through gossip, it teaches us about the behaviours we find unacceptable. In short, while it may not provide us with a degree, our culture is a far more effective teacher than any of our universities. Its laws may be largely unwritten but our culture is far more powerful at controlling our actions than any police force.

Cultures provide us with a powerful and reassuring sense of identity. Most human-beings still die within a 50 mile radius of where they were born and most of us will marry someone from the same nationality, ethnic group and social class, with the same values, attitudes and interests as ourselves.<sup>17</sup> So when we open our eyes to the world, we mainly see our own culture reflected back to us, reinforcing our sense of belonging, the pride we feel in our tribe and the validity of our shared values. Culture acts as a social glue which keeps us bonded to those around us, setting common rules, sustaining common attitudes, perpetuating common beliefs and encouraging common behaviour. Our culture surrounds us every day, grounding us in place and time, embracing us with its familiarity and providing us with the knowledge we need to survive and prosper in our environment. By educating us about the collectively agreed norms of social interaction, culture makes our world safer and more predictable, protecting us from the pain of public humiliation and social exclusion.

Yet a strong attachment to any culture can also have downsides. Our culture can easily become so familiar that we believe everything it teaches us is objectively true, rather than merely subjective and learned. Culture creates a narrative we tell to ourselves, about ourselves, so often portrays a rose-coloured interpretation of who we are and leads us to believe that our values have greater value than those of other groups. Such a perspective can fuel inter-group conflicts, cause us to retreat from other groups or reject the inclusion of new members to our group, in order to retain cultural purity. Indeed, we can become so attached to our culture that we even become suspicious of anyone within our own group, who doesn't always conform to its maxims, thus fragmenting the group, creating intra-group conflicts and tempting one sub-group to suppress the other. Culture is therefore the source of much of the conflict in the world yet, rather bizarrely, all culture originates in the mind and all humans share essentially the same brain. Because it is unconscious to us, we often don't appreciate the degree to which culture shapes our mind yet, although it's hard to imagine of those cultures which seem most alien, we would all grow to love cultural characteristics of any group we were born into, if it nurtured and helped to create who we are.

Groups are essential to cultural anthropologists because defining culture simply means identifying and articulating common ways of life – values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours – which are shared amongst a particular group of people. As individuals, we are all automatically members of many groups based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, profession, nationality, language, religion or any number of other characteristics. We also often choose to join further groups, based on our hobbies, interests, pastimes, passions or politics. As members of these groups, we invariably come into contact with other members and, as the contents of our minds interpenetrate through conversations and other interactions, a 'collective mind' or culture is formed, as the emergent output.

A useful analogy might be to consider our simplest social group, consisting of just two members such as a married couple. The 'cultural' characteristics of their relationship are inevitably the result of thousands of verbal, physical and emotional interactions between them, in which each partner has negotiated their respective role in their joint social contract, and agreed, often unconsciously, how each will behave within their two person group. Their marriage is therefore a sort of collective mind, which emerges from the interpenetration of their individual minds and lives in the ether around them, enveloping them both within it. Each brings

to the marriage their own unique genetic identity plus cultural biases (courtesy of their own parents and the environment in which they themselves were raised), yet together they create a brand new web of values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in which they raise their own children. The collective mind or culture they form isn't static but ever evolving, yet there will invariably be dominant values and behaviours they both agree upon, which they consciously or unconsciously embed within the many systems and structures they employ to run their lives. These include hundreds of tiny routines and habits, such as how they manage meal times and how tidy they keep their home, plus more occasional considerations such as where they go on holiday and what type of car they drive.

Although they may appear innocuous, all of these decisions say something specific about the couple's collective mind and, by embedding their values into these decisions, they create and communicate a family culture which fills the unconscious minds of their kids. From the day their children are born, they cannot avoid being shaped by the environment in which they grow; which subliminally soaks their parents culture into them, inculcating their unconscious minds with valuable learning about what's important and how things work, within their family unit. In reality, of course, it's very rare that any child is only ever exposed to his or her parents. Most nuclear families are nested within a wider family group of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, all of whom also co-create and share a common family culture. Like Russian dolls, we are then further nested within layers of successive groups such as villages, towns, regions, countries, continents and ultimately one vast global human society.

Arthur Koestler coined the term '*holon*' to describe such phenomena, which are simultaneously wholes yet also parts of larger wholes. For example, while each of us is a whole, individual human-being, we are all also made of body parts and sub-systems – such as the heart or respiratory system – which can be studied as holons and which themselves consist of holonic parts, such as the aortic valve or lungs. The aortic valve is one small part of our heart and one very small part of our whole body system, yet they are all clearly interconnected and exert mutual influence on one another. A faulty aortic valve can have major consequences for our heart and body, but equally the fuel we feed our bodies can influence the health of our heart and aortic valve. As we will explore in Chapter 3, this notion of nested holons exerting mutual influence is core to understanding complex adaptive systems, of which the human brain and human society are but two of many examples.

The individual and collective minds are thus similarly connected. Culture emerges from the interpenetration of the individual minds in any group, with each person contributing ‘upwards’ to the collective mind, while the culture they co-create exerts ‘downward’ influence on each individual, by filling their unconscious mind with content. We don’t all contribute equally ‘upwards’ – elites are more influential than non-elites for example – nor are we equally influenced ‘downwards’ – we all have a degree of free will – but with more than 90% of our thoughts and actions being unconscious, we are all unavoidably influenced by the cultures we contribute to, and which exert influence on us. Far from being autonomous animals navigating the world with our conscious intellect, how we think and act is largely the product of the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours unconsciously imposed upon us by our group memberships. Because most of our groups tend to consist of people pretty much like us – who look the same, have a similar background and already hold many of the same views – the maintenance of culture becomes a somewhat self-fulfilling prophecy.

Our dominant culture therefore acts like a sort of ‘brain-cloud’ hovering above us. We receive a daily drenching which soaks its values into us, reaffirming the righteousness of what we already believe and directing our thoughts and behaviours for the day. Droplets then condense overnight from the invisible vapour of our attitudes and actions, ready to drench us again the next day in a perpetual and self-sustaining cycle. Culture is so pervasive we are rarely even aware of its existence and we maintain it in millions of tiny ways, from what we gossip about to how we raise our children. From the day we are born an ocean of information fills a deep well within our mind, which we draw upon throughout life. This unconscious well quickly becomes the source of almost everything we know, shapes where we focus in the present and guides our path into the future. From this self-replenishing source, we draw much of the data we need to safely navigate our way in the world and its content – the learning and life-skills taught to us by culture – enables us to fit into our groups, achieve our goals and progress in life. In return, we refill it daily by contributing to a stream of cultural content which subliminally re-soaks the minds of all group members.

Yet, we are clearly not clones of one another – culture forms only part of what drives us. Nor are we automatons – we do have a degree of conscious control over how we think and act. Culture is ultimately rooted in the modus operandi of the brain, in which the interplay of opposites

plays an essential role and, as a consequence, culture is never unidirectional but the net effect of contradictory forces, from which dominant values and habits may emerge but which always contains some level of 'counter-culture'. Culture can therefore be changed, because we each have the conscious capability to choose alternative beliefs and behaviours. Groups can create new collective minds and, with enough popular support, a new dominant culture can emerge. As conceptual as this may sound, it is exactly our experienced reality as liberal impulses constantly compete with conservative tendencies to set the agenda for public discourse, and the moral framework for private intercourse. Every day opposing approaches towards all aspects of human society, such as freedom, family, justice, law, war, science, religion, welfare, ecology, human rights and gender roles, vie for pre-eminence. Attitudes certainly don't all point in one direction but compete against each other in a maelstrom of contrary opinions yet, from this interplay of minds, some semblance of order always emerges; the remarkable output of two complex adaptive systems, one nested within the other.

At whichever level of society culture is formed – local, regional, national, international or global – it originates in the human brain and emerges from the interpenetration of group members' minds. Every piece of cultural content we co-create, from a conversation to a company to a common market, is both a product of mind and subliminally shapes the minds of those who encounter it, because it is automatically imbued with our values and beliefs. As such, our creations either sustain the narrative of our dominant culture or push against it by telling a tale from a counter-culture, yet cultures aren't necessarily full of conflict. On the contrary, healthy cultures benefit greatly from the vitality brought by opposing forces which, by pushing against each other, create a 'dynamic stability' which is far better for human societies than the type of order created by high homogeneity and rigid conformity. With too little dynamic diversity a culture can easily become insular, adopting a tendency towards 'groupthink' and thus losing its ability to innovate in order to successfully adapt to external environmental changes; a common cause of societal collapse throughout history.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, excessive diverse energy can also push a culture too far in the opposite direction, causing healthy competition – that which is conducted within an overarching spirit of co-operation – to escalate into conflict, violence and even genocide. History shows us that when cultures lose control, dynamic stability can escalate into chaos, also resulting in societal breakdown. Extremes

of stasis and chaos must therefore be resisted and, to avoid endangering themselves, societies must remain within a healthy range of equilibrium between the two.

Many of us might consider Saudi Arabia, for example, to be an unattractive culture because it appears to be ruled by strictly enforced codes of conduct, with relatively restricted personal freedom. At the other extreme, a country like Somalia perhaps typifies a radically different but equally unattractive culture, in which a lack of governmental control has almost tipped society into chaos. While we may have a more positive perspective, had we been brought up in either state, most of us probably wouldn't choose to emigrate there. Instead, we might reasonably consider that an attractive culture – one which would be conducive to our personal health and happiness – would inhabit the spectrum between the two poles of strict order and uncontrolled freedom. We might be drawn towards Scandinavian egalitarianism or the individualism of North America. We may prefer the familial inclusiveness of Southern Europe, the adventurous spirit of the Antipodeans or the calm spirituality of the East. These stereotypical cultures all vary in the degree to which they are ordered versus free, yet none are as strict as Saudi or as uncontrolled as Somalia. As humans, we understand intuitively that to be healthy requires a balance of opposites, and we would each be attracted towards a blend of cultural characteristics which are consistent with the particular make up of our own mind. The human brain operates by blending opposites to maintain healthy balance and, because all culture begins and ends in the mind, it is no coincidence that both individual and collective minds share this fundamental need. Order and freedom are two opposite, yet essential, characteristics which both minds blend to deliver a healthy level of dynamic stability but which, at either polar extreme, can be unhealthy and even dangerous. Too much order or too much freedom may eventually lead to mental or societal breakdown.

As we'll explore in Chapter 4, a healthy range of equilibrium is maintained in the individual mind by the two hemispheres of the neo-cortex, which process the information they receive in directly opposite but complementary ways. While both hemispheres play a role in all cognition it wouldn't make evolutionary sense for them to both do the same job, so they take radically different approaches to everything we encounter in life. For example, it is primarily via the right hemisphere through which we are embedded in the outer world of multi-sensory experience; the deluge of data which the right mind passes to the left hemisphere for

analysis and categorization. Each hemisphere therefore brings a very different perspective to freedom and order – the right mind revelling in wide-ranging flexibility to which the left mind is compelled to bring essential structure.

Of course, freedom and order are only two of myriad polar considerations for the human brain, which basically operates by processing the phenomena we experience as opposites. To see light we must also see dark, to feel cold we must also be able to feel warmth, to grasp the concept of good we must also understand the idea of evil. As those in the East have always recognized, the world is full of opposites and for every yin there must be a yang. Our brains essentially work by blending contradictory concepts but because each hemisphere takes a different approach and because we all have a degree of conscious free will, it is perfectly possible that preferences for the output of either hemisphere, in the individual mind, can become amplified in the collective mind to create cultures which are radically imbalanced. It only takes enough individuals to consistently prioritize the perspective produced by either hemisphere, and to fail to blend it in balance with its counterpart, to shift from healthy dynamic stability towards either stasis or chaos. As we'll discover, the rigid order of Saudi Arabia is strongly suggestive of the cultural dominance of the left mind, while the anarchic freedom of Somalian culture is indicative of an unfettered right mind.

In both cases, failure to blend each impulse with the moderating influence of the opposite perspective, points to a collective mind which is operating at a level of consciousness which is sub-optimal for high quality cognition. We need our consciousness to challenge the validity of dominant cultures and, if they become too imbalanced, to reverse their trajectory to ensure they remain dynamically stable, within a healthy range of equilibrium. If consciousness is suppressed, the collective mind becomes even more ruled by the unconscious than usual, the prevalent culture exerts ever greater downward pressure and individuals become prone to operating on a sort of behavioural 'autopilot', which makes the dominant culture harder to change.

This is why freedom of speech is such a vital characteristic of healthy cultures and why the case of Saudi Arabian Raif Badawi has caused such international outrage. In 2012 Badawi, a 28-year-old liberal writer and activist, was charged with several crimes relating to the content of his online blog and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment plus 1000 lashes. Over a million people worldwide signed Amnesty International's petition

calling for his release. Badawi's case highlights why any culture, no matter how dominant, can never be 100% 'pure' because all culture originates in the human brain and our minds will always produce contrary impulses. More significantly, in systems terms, it also illuminates a feature the mind shares with all other living organisms – that they will always attempt to heal themselves. Coherence is the natural state of all complex adaptive systems which, for minds and cultures, means dynamic stability within a range of equilibrium between polar extremes. If they become unhealthy, that is to say imbalanced or incoherent, they will automatically dial up the opposite impulse to try to redress the balance and become 'whole' again. Healing, of course, re-establishes wholeness. Raif Badawi's blog, as insignificant as it may seem, is just one small attempt to regain cultural wholeness in Saudi Arabia by having the liberal voice of the right mind heard.

Culture is therefore very much a double-edged sword for modern humans, operating as we are with ancient brains which aren't fit for the global complexity of the 21st century. Individually we really aren't very smart and there's no indication that we are getting any smarter. However, we became an intelligent species through language and our ability to embed information in cultural artefacts, which convey learning across time and space and enable us to pass knowledge inter-generationally. Most of our actions being unconsciously driven by culture is an evolutionary, energy-saving device which allows us to only use energy-depletive consciousness when we really need it. Our superior consciousness gives us greater free will than any other animal, but it's a mixed blessing because it also gives us greater scope to make collective choices and create cultures which are bad for our health. This is exactly what has happened at the level of our global human holon. Of course, we have damaged ourselves inadvertently – no species would knowingly make itself sick – but an unhealthy global culture is nevertheless the output of all our minds, so if we want to become whole again, we have to change the way we think. In particular we must elevate our consciousness to make better choices.

## The Big Picture

On our current trajectory, the future of the human species doesn't look good but dominant cultures can be changed. However, to consistently think in a manner which runs counter to the influence of any powerful culture isn't easy. We must first become aware of the grip it has on us, then consistently guard against its unconscious influence by using our

conscious mind to make alternative choices. Other than in the most oppressive regimes, cultural content is rarely homogenous but diverse and multivalent, so if we can elevate our minds to become aware of the possibilities, we can select from an array of options which is only limited by our taste and creativity. The more our culture allows freedom of expression, and the greater openness it has to outside influences, the more we also expose ourselves to people whose minds are different from ours. Culture changes slowly because most of what we choose, consciously or unconsciously, is consistent with those values and structures which are so familiar to us. However, the more often we choose less pervasive, counter-cultural options, and the larger the number of people who make similar choices, the further and faster the culture will shift. If enough people, with sufficient influence, regularly think and act in a manner which promotes values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural norms which run counter to the dominant culture in any society, its centre of gravity will shift; slowly at first but with increasing momentum until a new prevailing culture can become established. To become sustainable, new values must then be embedded into cultural artefacts, in particular political, economic and civic systems, structures and institutions. In theory at least, a new global culture is therefore possible – one which would be conducive to systemic coherence, global peace and individual health and happiness.

When we look around the world, we could perhaps be forgiven for concluding that there are hundreds of distinctly different cultures, and that any aspiration to find common ground is therefore doomed to failure. Yet all cultures originate in the same human brain so, far from being genuinely different, all cultures must simply be varying blends, and all artefacts different expressions, of the same cognitive impulses. By understanding the human brain, how it works, the nature of its outputs and the many systemic flaws in its modus operandi, we can better understand the global mind we collectively create. By exploring the opposing tendencies of the left and right hemispheres, we can better appreciate how unhealthy cultural imbalance can be created, yet consciously rebalanced.

Given that all humans share 99.9% of our DNA and have the same cognitive equipment, it isn't too much of a stretch to imagine that if we were to consciously create a desirable global culture, most people would select at least some characteristics – such as peace, love, empathy, tolerance and respect – which are rooted in our common humanity. Most of us would accept that a healthy global culture must contain a degree of competition, as long as it takes place within an overarching spirit of mutual co-operation.

A majority might even consider that collaboration between nations, to stop damaging the only planet capable of sustaining human life, is also a good idea. While we are right to protect the uniqueness of our ethnic or national groups, many may see the whole human species as a distinctive group with a long shared history, which also deserves to be protected. Why then, do we seem to be having such great difficulty in creating a global culture which is conducive to peace, health and happiness?

One answer lies in the fact that the global mind can't be controlled but emerges organically from the interplay of over 7 billion individual minds; one of the largest of all complex systems, perhaps exceeded only by the planetary biosphere and the universe for unfathomable complexity. As such, it can't be designed or engineered in any conventional sense and no individual or group, at any level, can manage or even accurately predict its outputs.

A second answer lies in the complex adaptive system between our ears which, in spite of its much smaller scale, is an even greater mystery to us than its larger counterpart. The global mind emerges from the interplay of individual minds but the human brain evolved to help us survive, not to enable us to understand exactly how it works and we certainly can't always control what it produces. All we can try to do, as individuals, is increase our personal consciousness to deliver balanced thoughts and actions which contribute towards the co-creation of healthy cultures.

A third answer lies in the fact that the creation of culture is a joint venture and, although we are innately social animals, we don't always agree with each other. This isn't such a problem in familial groups, where genetic bonds tend to trump inter-kin quarrels, but as soon as social groups expand beyond family and friends, humans have always faced the challenge of how to maintain harmony amongst strangers. Indeed, we rely upon the cultural structures we create – social, legal, religious, political and economic – to promote the common attitudinal and behavioural habits which bind groups together, as well as providing non-violent means of conflict resolution. At every level of human society, therefore, culture is the key to providing peace, stability and co-operation, both within and between groups.

Critically, our minds are increasingly interpenetrating. With globalization the world is rapidly becoming a smaller place and, as groups come into more and more contact with those from other cultural backgrounds, differences of opinion are inevitable. Through politics, the sovereign autonomy of nation states is being eroded, as international and inter-

continental institutions exert ever greater influence. Through economics, global markets are connecting consumers and producers from diverse locations, driving new employment opportunities for some but also creating widespread uncertainty. Through technology, we are becoming increasingly connected to multiple networks of individuals, based on all manner of common interests, enabling ideas and unrest to spread like wildfire. Through cheaper travel, we are increasingly being exposed to people and places we have never before experienced. Through transnational migration, cultural assimilation is necessarily taking place but with mixed results, bringing valuable diversity but also conflict. The net effect of these globalizing movements, and many more, is to shrink our planet, bringing people together, making their minds meet and, in doing so, creating cultural tension.

As the sands beneath their feet start to shift, some people inevitably embrace the opportunities presented, while others, feeling increasingly anxious about the uncertainty of change, are doing what humans often do in such circumstances; retrenching into familiar behavioural patterns and building attitudinal walls between their group and those they believe are threatening their lifestyles. Pressures are growing both within and between nation states, as people try to make sense of what is taking place all around us. In particular, at each level of societal holon, friction is being felt between those groups who are deeply attached to the dominant culture, who benefit most from it and therefore wish to preserve its pre-eminence, and those groups who would gain greatest advantage from its transformation. How such tensions are manifesting varies from country to country, shaped by the rich texture of each states unique historical narrative, but none of the 195+ nations of the world are immune from the effects of globalization.

When we are all so busy living our daily lives, it can be difficult to contextualise the chaos taking place in the world as anything other than the '*stuff of life*', whipping around us like a whirlwind. Even if we could find the necessary distance to stand back from events, 'joining the dots' across time and space isn't easy. What happens in one location often doesn't appear to be connected to what happens elsewhere, and our timeline only stretches as far back as occurrences we can easily recall. Yet, if we zoom out to see the whole of human society and view historical events through the same wide-angled lens, we are able to discern clear connections between the macro global mind and the micro individual mind, which give us a sharp focus on how our species arrived where we are today. At

lower levels of perception, the many tensions and troubles look like wars between nations over natural resources, or political power plays between competing factions within countries. They manifest as fights between religions, or battles between winners and losers in the game of global economics. They appear to be skirmishes based on ethnicity, class and colour, or clear expressions of gender and minority oppression. Indeed, when viewed at lower holonic levels, that is exactly what they are. However, at higher levels clear patterns emerge.

While we may recognize that cultural differences play a role in many such events, it is often difficult to discern a clear connection between, for example, the Arab Spring uprisings, honour killings in India, environmental pollution in China, heightened racial tension in the US and economic austerity in the European Union. It is the contention of this book that they are indeed all connected, not only to each other but to myriad other conflicts in the world today. When viewed at the level of global human society, they are all shockwaves rising from the tectonic plates of culture shifting between dominant worldviews, with three powerful protagonists vying for supremacy. As citizens of the 21st century we are living through an epochal transformation of global culture, as the perspective which has dominated the modern era, bringing many great benefits but ultimately making our species sick, is under attack from two alternative worldviews and their concomitant cultures. The first was formerly pre-eminent for a thousand years and now, sensing the weakening of its ancient adversary, is trying to reassert its authority. The other is a relative newcomer, yet is rooted in our most original cognitive impulses, and is re-emerging as the human system attempts to heal itself. Three distinct cultural perspectives are each struggling for supremacy, are the root source of the global chaos we are currently experiencing and are all connected by their origins in the human brain. The future we bring forth will be co-created by our collective global mind, yet at the moment our destiny is unknown. The human species has a choice to make. It can continue to make itself sick or it can make itself whole again. We are a world in two minds. With our ancient brains, will we be smart enough to make the right decision?