

## HOW DO MINDSETS SHIFT?

WHAT IS A MINDSET AND A MINDSHIFT? THESE TWO QUESTIONS HAVE HAUNTED US THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT OF 'IN100YEARS'. ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR IN PHILOSOPHY, OLE FOGH KIRKEBY, ANY MINDSET IS ANCHORED IN OUR ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS AS WELL AS IN OUR EMOTIONS AND WAYS OF WANTING AND WILLING. OUR BASIC VALUES ARE THUS THE PLATFORM FROM WHICH WE COULD INITIATE A NEW BEGINNING. THE QUESTION IS, ARE WE ARE READY?

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What is a mindset? One reasonable answer would be that it is a closed set of questions and answers of major existential questions at the common sense level. Yet there are no simple answers to questions such as: what is a human being and what is childhood, gender, life, death, labor, economy, time and nature? Consequently, a mindset would consist of games of experience, language, knowledge, truth and actions. We might not, however, be able to create a fundamental understanding of such 'games', since we are part of them ourselves, and since they shape our ways of perceiving and reflecting.

### THE CAPITALIST MINDSET

The capitalist mindset – inside which we have to admit we are still living – delimits knowledge in a positive and a negative way. Positively, it makes it possible to understand the forces of history and the interplay between the economical basis and the culture answering to it. Negatively, this might block our understanding of the powers of culture, since capitalism transforms culture into an epiphenomenon.

There are probably universal values like the Good, the Just, the True and the Beautiful, in spite of their historical-cultural interpretations. Beyond this, today it seems as if liberalist capitalism is the dominating mindset in the world, in spite of religious and political attempts at negating its magic of 'a good life'. Since capitalism was paradoxically integrated in Christianity and the Humanist movement, and was the aspiration to the civil, political and social rights creating societal structures and forms of living (which defied the influence of parochial narrow-mindedness, religious dogmatism and totalitarianism), it also produced uncontrollable markets, complicated relations of domination inside and between nations, and, unfortunately, an accelerating destruction of nature. This Janus face of capitalism defines our mindset, as well as any reaction against it. The burning question is, whether it also sets the horizon of any conception of the future?

If we ask who defines and represents this mindset, the answer would probably be, that we all do. This implies that even if any reaction against this dominating mindset must be political, it also has to be reflective in the sense that change presupposes a mental labor on our selves. We must learn to think, feel and imagine alternatively in order to transgress this mindset through action.

Any mindset is anchored and incorporated in pre-reflective assumptions and beliefs, in bodily experiences and capacities, in emotions and ways of wanting and willing. It is also incorporated in our mores and our faith, in our sense of reality and certainty, and it is carried by a deeply rooted normativity and by a practice of discursive reason or reflection. However, normativity, our basic values, and our powers to think, are also the platform from which we could initiate a new beginning.

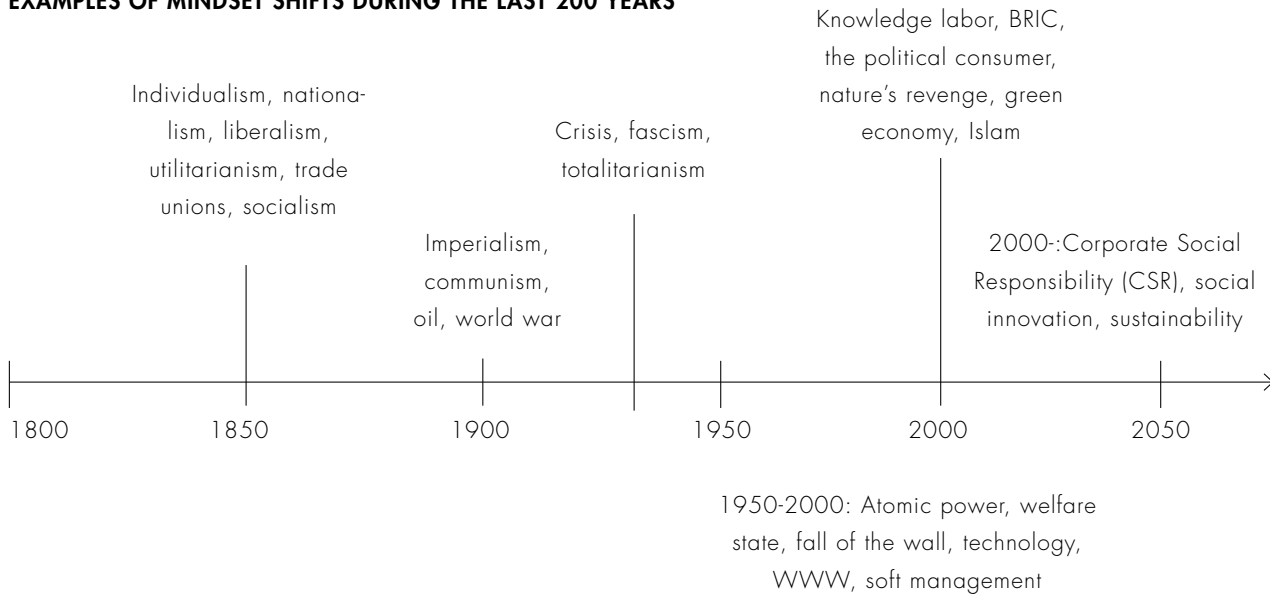
### A NEW BEGINNING

How does all this emerge? It is, after all, hard to give up the notion of the existence of one true mindset, and about a progressive development of mindsets, or even about an evolution of the mind? This experience of the revelation of truth is not confined to religious experience, but applies to science as well. There are countless narratives incorporating the mindset shift of scholars; 'Newton's Apple' is perhaps the most well known. However, the change of mindset presupposes rather complicated causal structures, incorporating power and pragmatism.

When the Protestants encouraged the publishing of Copernicus' 'De revolutionibus orbium coelestium' in 1543, when the pope had banned it, they knew that the heliocentric world view could obviously both negate and affirm the Bible. However, since it challenged the dogmas, and hence the power of the Catholics, they chose it. Scientifically, they seemed to be on the side of progress.

Such choices might, after all, not confirm any 'wisdom of history'. The First World War produced an anti-armament, anti-war, pro-peace mindset in the English people and its politics. But it also provided Hitler with an opportunity to mobilize and conquer Poland. Even

## EXAMPLES OF MINDSET SHIFTS DURING THE LAST 200 YEARS



mindset changes with an ethical acumen do not guarantee anything, unless their impact is close to global.

It has long been discussed whether the rebellious optics of the enlightenment, which produced the American Constitution and the Rights of Man, transformed feudal France into a military dictatorship and whether the reformation of the institutions of agriculture in Denmark, only confirmed the rights of the bourgeoisie? However, the ideologies of individual freedom fostered nationalism, liberalism as well as utilitarianism. The effect was a free labor market in Europe, the powers of the factory owners, industrial capitalism, and hence, a production and an immense oppression of the lower classes, both economically, politically and culturally, which in turn prepared the road to militarism and imperialism. It also made trade unions and socialism possible and necessary. Karl Marx's book 'Das Kapital' incorporated a mindshift, which, contrary to its aim, came to legitimate communist totalitarianism.

There seems to be a huge gap between the consciousness of the mind shift movers in front and the underlying forces and their dynamics which have consequences probably neither imagined nor desired. To this one must add that a new mindset is always **SOMEBODY'S** mindset, i.e. it belongs to a politically or culturally dominant class. It has never yet comprised the whole national population, let alone the so-called 'Third World'. It always was, and it still is, the 'conquerors' who usurp the right to dictate the content and to tell the stories of mindset-shifts, as Nietzsche wrote.

### THE NEW MINDSET

Is a new mindset, the core of social responsibility and sustainability, beginning to emerge, and is this at all possible within liberalist capitalism? Which individual attitude would answer to it? Would it be theoretical wisdom,

scientifically inspired consciousness or practical wisdom? To list the causes of a new mindset is very complicated, if not impossible, but amongst the triggering events are: The victories and catastrophes: Salamis, Versailles and Hiroshima. The new technologies. The establishing of regimes. The scientific revolutions. But also the, so to speak, 'ultimate event' and its stories, above all the crucifixion.

If a mindset is a closed set of definite questions and answers and the individual 'micro-level', we have no mindset at the common sense level. We do not know what death is. We do not know the universe, neither its meaning nor its mechanisms. We neither agree on the condition of nature nor about the essence of man. And most importantly, we do not share common conscious interests, although one could ascribe sustainability as a shared interest to everybody. We are atheists, Christians, Muslims, socialists, libertarians, vegetarians, greedy consumers, reckless exploiters of all available resources, environmentalists, imperialists, Buddhists, critical intellectuals, shareholders, drug addicts, alphabets and unemployed ... the biggest problems facing the ideal of a common, global mindset are dogmatism (political and religious), cynicism and ignorance (alphabetism), indifference, greed, recklessness, desire for power and egoism.

Is a new mindset the result of a reflective process deliberately effectuated with conscious knowledge of knowledge? Is it staged by power through political pressure, education, laws, rules of conduct, threat of punishment, surveillance and control, or does it just happen, i.e. emerge from the bottom? Or is it change by my will to transform myself? My guess is that all three elements are necessary.

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