

# Can bytes save the future? The money value delusion



Terje Bongard, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research

[Terje.bongard@nina.no](mailto:Terje.bongard@nina.no) phone +47 986 44 786

On behalf of us all, investors make the same mistake as King Midas did. Human behavioural ecology knows why this paradox exists. Would it help if everybody knew?

## Mate choice and sexual selection is the ultimate evolutionary force that has shaped the human mind.

Cognitive mechanisms like consciousness, language ability and emotions are ultimate evolved strategies in the battle over mates. Status, showing off, beauty and the quest for value symbols are universal mate preferences. They are expressed in some form or another in all cultures, through all times.

## Fortunately, attractive mate strategies also include the urge to display generosity and cooperation.

Game theory reveals these human universals, and under which circumstances they appear and thrive. Human evolutionary past consisted of 'ingroups' in which all members knew each other. These ingroups favoured sexual selection through a well-known behavioral mechanism called the Handicap Principle. The peacock's tail is only the tip of an iceberg compared to the human results of this attractivity selection: «Look at me, I can be generous and share my wealth, I can show-off and bear burdens of all kinds, and still be top among peers». In cities, extreme examples are observed.

## Cultures are in this way manifestations of the roots of sexual selection. This pattern is overwhelmingly clear, once seen.

Unfortunately, the global community is now among 'outgroups', and the cooperation and generosity found among friends and small groups meet with the evolved human strategies of competition with «the unknown, the outsiders»; potentially uncertain competitors, out to seek the same resources, habitats and mates as ourselves. The global capitalism is a result of such outgroup strategies.

From this, several important insights and suggestions to solutions emerge. Here are two examples to show the range of implications:

1. **The Norwegian petroleum policy is following the logic of profit: Empty the reservoirs and convert it into value symbols as fast as possible:**  
«Norway's petroleum fund is now so big that we can subsist on it forever» (Torgeir Micaelsen, Chairman of the finance committee of the Norwegian parliament, speaking on national TV).

Will it be a choice between the last meal on earth, and a data server containing 350 billion Euro...

2. **Fish farming is using more resources than it produces. Because of the profit, this unsustainable industry is looked upon as successful. «The money feeling» is short-sighted, and evolved during a time of plenty where there was no need for planning for centuries.**

Is it possible to design a democratic, solidary and sustainable society, stabilised by human ingroup drivers?



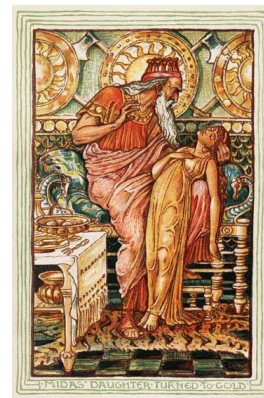
In our book «The biological human being – individuals and societies in the light of evolution» (preliminary only in Norwegian) we suggest a model for a national and global ultimate democratic economy, which can handle and execute ownership on five levels (see figure to the right). It is both about curbing the bad sides and letting the good sides thrive. There are several prerequisites in order to stabilise such an organisation, of which three are most important:

1. **A political solution to sustainability must include democratic control over production and economy.**
2. **Production must be for the purpose of sustainability, not profit.**
3. **Civil salaries must include all and be decided democratically.**

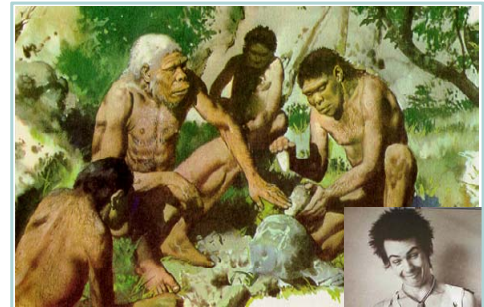
This can be achieved through ingroup control over the unwanted, selfish strategies of our human mind: When we are observed, among our closest, we hide egoism and are cooperative and generous. No-one is openly selfish when being watched. This democracy, once established, will be extremely stable. Justice and fairness will be decided through open democratic decisions, by elected peers, on each level. Freeriders are controlled within the groups. Surely, we CAN decide to keep on overexploitation, and send our children into an uncertain future, but we will at least decide it ourselves. For example, in the US, only a few extremely rich persons may win elections.

A safer future can be planned. Profit and economic growth can be replaced by sustainable production: Reusable, repairable and recyclable products. Research and efforts can be focused to meet these goals, without the need for capital growth and profit. Solidarity will be forced upon decision making, through the evolved ingroup strategies.

**We suggest an interdisciplinary research group on concrete solutions like this. Please contact us if you find this interesting.**



King Midas got his highest wish granted: All he touched turned to gold. Here seen with his golden daughter. He starved to death shortly after.



«I'll die before I'm 25, and when I die I will have lived the way I wanted to.»  
Sid Vicious (1957–1979), Sex Pistols

The universal locations of cognitive mechanisms are now read with brain scanning techniques. Emotions are evolved as positive or negative drivers - rewards or punishments - to seek or respectively avoid, certain situations and actions. The environment we live in merely push the buttons. No button – no reaction: How did you learn the taste of sugar? The feeling of pain? The rewarding sensation of money, the locations seen in this picture? What about the urge to be visible? The need to be right in discussions...? The buttons are inherited from our ancestors, because those who had them, won. The others didn't.

