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**Cultures of Decision-Making**

*by*

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When we talk about decision-making we usually take for granted what this really means. But if you take a closer look, you will find that this is not self-evident. In this lecture, I want to deal with decision-making as a historical object. However, this does not mean looking at the question of which specific decisions were made in this or that historical situation, or for which reasons. Historians have always been interested in questions of this kind. But they have usually presupposed *that* decisions were made. It is our everyday conviction that all social action is normally based on decisions (and that they are made on the basis of rational consideration). I want to argue that this assumption is by no means self-evident, and indeed not even probable. Rather, whether and to what extent a certain situation is framed, modelled, staged, perceived and interpreted as a decision-making situation is variable and culturally dependent. In other words, decision-making is a cultural technique that is shaped and managed differently over time. On the one hand, deciding is a fundamental problem that arises from the need to deal with social complexity; it is a form of social action that plays a unique role for the structure of the social order in which it takes place. On the other hand, however, it takes different forms at different times.

Decision-making has a history that has not yet been written.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I will, first of all, take a step back and define what I actually mean by decision-making and ‘a decision.’ Even that is not as clear as the everyday use of the word might suggest. I will then very briefly visualize various concepts of decision-making by significant metaphors (I). Second, I will have a short look at modern societies as so-called ‘decision-societies’ (II). In the third part of this lecture, I will turn to a historical example in more detail, namely the royal election in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, which was a very early and very special decision-making procedure (III). Finally, I will give a summary in six theses (IV).

## **I. Concepts and Metaphors**

When I talk of decision-making, I do not mean the internal, purely mental event, but rather a form of social action. The inner ‘act of deciding’ is not externally observable, so historians should leave this to psychologists. As a historian, I am interested in decision-making as a *communicative* phenomenon, and primarily (but not exclusively) as a *collective* action. Decision-making means: first, isolating explicitly certain

alternative courses of action from the infinite, diffuse ocean of the possible, and, second, committing to one of these alternatives, also explicitly, and acting according to it. A decision in this sense is an *incision*; it creates a caesura in the course of time. This is also revealed by the etymology of the word ‘decision’ (in German *Entscheidung*), derived from the Latin *de-cisio*, from *decidere*, to cut off. A decision is a cut in time. The decision separates the previous from the thereafter – namely, the past (in which there were still several options) from the future (in which one has already committed oneself and now acts in accordance with the one option selected).

However, things do not always happen in such a clear-cut way in social reality. The question of whether a social event has been a decision-making process or not is sometimes initially open, and it is only retrospectively that the event is put forward and rationalized as an action of decision-making. Looking back, we subsequently tend to identify deliberate decisions, whereas in the course of action there was no deliberate choice between explicit alternatives at all. We always tend to re-rationalize what we have done (in German: *nachrationalisieren*, there seems to be no English word for that). We tend to narrate decision stories.

Decisions are by definition contingent, that is, one could always decide otherwise. There is always a final leap from all rational considerations to the decision itself – or else it would not be a decision at all. A ‘decision without alternatives’ is a contradiction in terms, since if a decision followed inevitably from good reasons, this would be a deterministic deduction, an automatism, and not a decision. The key point is that this contingency makes explicit decision-making risky. For at the moment of deciding itself, the ‘correctness’ of the decision is never completely guaranteed. The discarded options remain as conceivable alternatives in memory. For this reason decisions are particularly vulnerable to conflict and exposed to a great deal of pressure to justify themselves. The accusation that one should have decided differently is always present. Decision-making is therefore by no means the rule, but the exception. It is usually preferable not to embark on it. Deciding is more troublesome than not deciding; it creates costs, and involves accountability and responsibility.

A decision is also often divisive in social terms. Where there may perhaps have been vague consensus before, a decision makes dissent visible. The defeated dissenters risk a loss of face. We might therefore talk of

the blessings of ambiguity, of the virtues of indecision. (I will return to this point later when I come to my historical example.) Explicit decision-making is always challenging. However, experience shows us that once a decision has been made it then to a certain extent accrues its own rationality retrospectively. An institution that produces formal decisions usually also has certain mechanisms at its disposal to ensure that its decisions appear in retrospect to have been correct and plausible – or even the only ones possible.

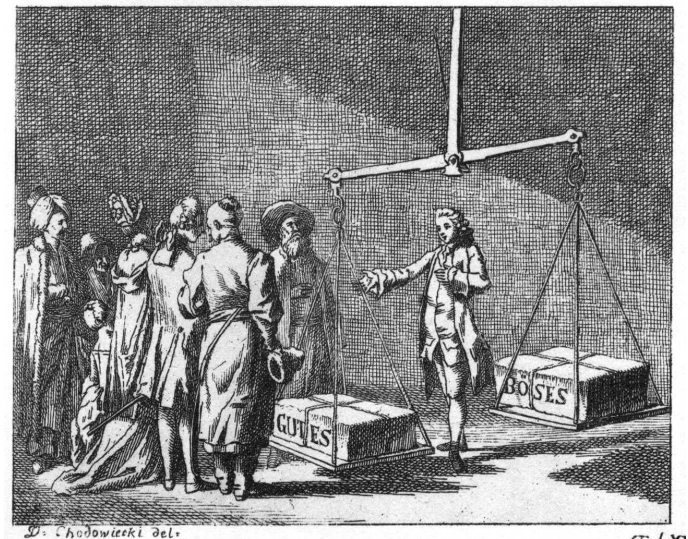
There are several metaphors and primal scenes in our reservoir of cultural symbols that illustrate decision-making – and they do so in very different ways. The most prominent of these primal scenes – in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim cultures as well – is the myth of the fall of man. ‘In paradise there were no problems of decision-making,’ a textbook on collective decisions claims.<sup>2</sup> Never having to decide would be a paradisiac ‘aimless state of happiness.’ But paradise was, as we know, ambivalent: it brought its two inhabitants the very first problem of decision-making. When God, according to Genesis, chapter 3, established one single explicit norm – not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge – the alternative inevitably came into the world, with the serpent making

this alternative explicit. In this myth of origin, decision-making is the act of human freedom itself – of freedom also to do evil. With their bite into the apple, Adam and Eve decided to be able to decide freely in the future, but also to have to do so. Paradise was, so to speak, ‘a pilot project in matters of discernment and freedom.’<sup>3</sup>

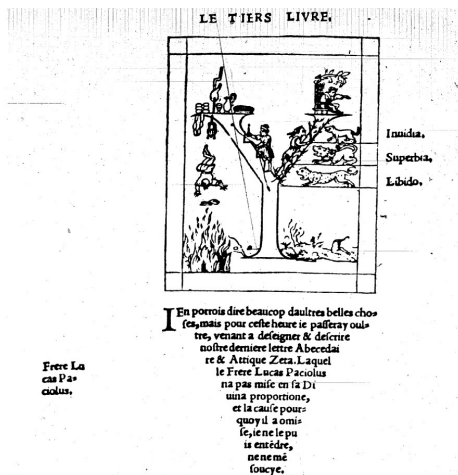
The fall from grace at the very beginning of history corresponds, as we know, to the Last Judgment at the end of history – also a primal scene of decision-making that presents the act of deciding as a court judgment. It is, though, no random act of deciding, but an act of weighing. In Memling’s famous painting, the Archangel Michael is holding a pair of scales in his hand – the scales to weigh souls in the Last Judgment.



The image of the scales negates to some extent the contingency of decision-making. For the scales move of their own accord, simply as a result of the weight – of good or evil deeds – that the soul of a sinner brings to them. The judgment follows from the weight of good or evil itself – without, as it were, the intervention of the judge. The same goes for the second image, a secularized, rationalistic variant of the scales to weigh souls from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the presentation of ‘reason’ that weighs good and evil against each other. This weighing by reason apparently leaves no room for freedom and arbitrariness.



The situation is different with the equally ancient and widely varied image of the crossroads.



This metaphor depicts human life as a wandering that gives each individual the free choice to opt for one of two paths: for the wide, luxurious and comfortable path on the left that leads in the end to a fall into hell, or the thorny and arduous path on the right that promises eternal salvation. Here, on the one hand, the freedom of decision-making is presented in the image, but on the other hand, there is no doubt as to which is the correct choice, and which the false.<sup>4</sup>

There is a significant difference between imagining the process of decision-making as an act of weighing or as the roll of the dice or the stroke of a sword. When a decision is made on the basis of throwing a die or drawing lots (which is not as rare as one may think), there is no relation at all between reasons for the decision and the decision itself – quite the contrary.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it is left to blind chance (or the hand of God) to determine how the decision *falls* (literally). In other words, the metaphor of throwing dice or drawing lots emphasizes very dramatically the general contingency of decision-making, that is, the fact that things could always have been decided differently. In stark contrast to the scales, the dice emphasize the factor of contingency, which, though, is in principle inherent in all decision-making.



The metaphor of the sword stroke is similar. The Gordian knot that Alexander the Great slices with his sword represents a situation in which the complexity of circumstances renders a rational weighing-up pointless, but in which nevertheless a decision has to be made; a situation therefore in which it is more reasonable to decide – even if the decision itself may be irrational – than not to act at all. Buridan's ass, which starved itself because it could not decide between two identical haystacks, is another prominent symbol of this.<sup>6</sup>



All these metaphors and metaphorical stories show that there are a number of ways to deal with the difficult problem of decision-making. At one end of the spectrum (the dice model), one goes on the offensive and emphasizes the contingency as such, while refraining completely from the weighing of reasons – by adopting techniques of random decision-making or through authoritative arbitrariness (this is what is called ‘decisionism’<sup>7</sup>). At the other extreme (the scale model), you make the contingency of a decision disappear as far as possible, such as through rationalistic programmes that claim to generate the ‘only one correct decision’, quasi automatically, in order to avoid the problems of legitimacy that always go along with decision-making.

## II. Modern Societies as Decision Societies

So, to what extent does decision-making have a historical dimension? My initial hypothesis was that it is by no means self-evident that actions should be modelled and interpreted as actions of decision-making, precisely because explicit decision-making is always a very difficult issue. To what extent is this subject to historical change?

Let us begin with the current situation. We are living today, as the German sociologist Uwe Schimank has

pointed out, in a 'decision society'.<sup>8</sup> This means that in our society much more is decidable, and at the same time also much more is in need of decision, than in previous societies. Modern organizations are built completely on decisions: public authorities, political parties, business companies and, indeed, most states are based on formal founding decisions (except England, of course), they reproduce their own structure in the form of decisions, and, if they are to be abolished, then this requires a formal decision, too. Even the most existential situations, birth and death, have become subject to medical decisions: parents must decide whether they wish to have their unborn child examined prenatally or not, and then whether to have the child or not. In the case of organ transplant, doctors must decide whether a patient is to be regarded as dead or not. I could mention many other cases here. On the other hand, the uncertainty of how to decide in a rational way is also growing. Given the unmanageable masses of information we have today, the decision options are becoming ever more incalculable. Given the global interweaving of social and political structures, the outcomes of decision-making are becoming ever more unpredictable. In other words, the difficulties of decision-making are constantly growing.

Reactions to this are contradictory. On the one hand, far-reaching decisions – for example, high-speed financial transactions – are trusted to the computer, that is, blind faith is placed in the rational effects of automated processes as per mathematical algorithms that appear to render human decision-making to some extent superfluous. Politicians like to sell their decisions as 'having no alternative', which is, as already stated, a contradiction in terms. In both cases, the contingency of decision-making seems to disappear (see the metaphor of the scales); this means adherence to a very optimistic belief in the possibility of the 'only one correct' decision. On the other hand, though, this almost irrational confidence in human rationality has since been permanently troubled. The classical rational-choice model of human action has been thoroughly challenged.<sup>9</sup> People, we now know, certainly do not decide after weighing up all the available information and on the basis of sound reasons ('bounded rationality').<sup>10</sup> Rather, they often decide on the basis of extensive ignorance by intuition and follow certain unspoken heuristics.<sup>11</sup> Sociologists today are discovering the blessings of indecision and are singing the praises of routine. Indecisive muddling-through has become socially



acceptable under the name of ‘incrementalism’.<sup>12</sup> Popular counsellors on everyday life advise us to sit things out, to wait, to practise inaction, to endure ambiguity. What is more: in some cases – such as in prenatal medicine – the right *not* to decide can seem to be morally advisable.

These observations show that we are currently experiencing decision-making in quite contradictory ways. In this situation, it might be helpful to take a step back so that we can look at the phenomenon of decision-making from a greater reflexive distance. The question is, then: if today’s society really is a ‘decision society’, then how has it become so? And how did people in past societies cope with decision-making? When and how was action modelled as decision-making action in the past – or perhaps not? Can we identify different ‘cultures of decision-making’? And how did they change?

### **III. A Historical Example: Royal Elections in the Holy Roman Empire**

To answer this question abstractly and generally is difficult if not impossible; and it would be tiring in any case. Rather, it can be done only by concrete examples. So, in the third part of my talk, I would like to give you an impression of the early modern culture of decision-

making. I will take an example from my own field of research: namely, the election of the king in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation. What you can study here is a very early (and very significant) formal process of collective decision-making. For the succession was always particularly prone to conflict, and therefore clarity was especially important.

Conflicts of succession were the most frequent causes of war in pre-modern times. Since the late Middle Ages, the right of succession to the throne in many European monarchies had become more and more formalized in written agreements and determined in advance for all possible cases. The aim was to transform the succession of rule into a quasi-natural automatism and to surround it with an aura of the unattainable. Thomas Hobbes therefore called birth-right a ‘natural lottery’.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the aim was to avoid any decision-making situation. The Salic law as it was interpreted in France from the 14<sup>th</sup> century is probably the most prominent example of this. Another significant case is the current British line of succession whose precisely numbered potential pretenders to the throne run into the thousands.<sup>14</sup> Even if such rules did not always prevent conflicts, the formal norm was that the death of the

ruler would trigger quasi-automatically the succession to the throne of the next heir, without the intervention of a decision.

This was different in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation.<sup>15</sup> Here, the new king was elected, which means that again and again a decision was needed.<sup>16</sup> This created problems. In the medieval Empire (similar to the papacy), the dominance of the electoral principle had repeatedly led to ambiguity and division.<sup>17</sup> In one place, *one* person could be king; in a different place, a different person. And in such cases, there was no person and no rule that could ultimately decide. Such an ambiguous situation could only be brought to an end by force of arms (which would then be considered God's judgment) – or not at all, meaning that the parties would have to accept a state of permanent irresolution. The experience of such crises caused by double elections resulted in an agreement on a formalized decision-making procedure fixed in writing – namely, Charles IV's famous Golden Bull of 1356. In the course of time, it acquired the status of an infrangible Basic Law of the Empire, and (regardless of several changes in detail) maintained a highly binding force until the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806.<sup>18</sup>



What changes did this early formalization of decision-making bring about? The Golden Bull specified the circle of seven prince-electors, their privileges, and ceremonial ranks. It determined place, time and proceedings of election; and it established majority rule. When all prince-electors or the majority of them have made their choice, it says, then the choice made is to be regarded as if it had been made by all of them unanimously and unopposed. One might say that the Golden Bull subjected the election of the king to the logic of classical drama – namely, the unity of place, time, characters and action. This was designed to guarantee, and this is the crucial point, that a decision was made at all. The Golden Bull was to ensure that the process of decision-making

would be safely set in motion and then conducted with certainty to its conclusion. As in the papal election procedure a century earlier,<sup>19</sup> the introduction of the majority principle and closure of the electoral body went hand in hand, and presupposed each other, for the majority principle can only be implemented when the group of participants is determined. This is precisely what characterizes formal procedures in general: namely, that the circle of participants is determined by membership rules; that abstract procedural steps are defined; and, above all, that the participants submit themselves to the decision in advance and irrespective of the result. This was exactly the case with the elections of the king in Germany in the early modern period. Each individual elector pledged himself at the beginning of the act of election to submit to the majority decision.

At that time, this was extremely unusual. Therefore, the procedure of pre-modern political assemblies normally looked completely different. Far too much was in the way of such a clear and unambiguous decision-making process: the high value of social harmony and consent, the great weight of rank and honour, and not least: the lack of power to force the minority to accept the decision. Majority rule has certain requirements

that were rarely given in pre-modern societies: open contradiction and contingency had to be endured. *Compositio*, agreement, was more appropriate under these circumstances than *decisio*, decision. Unanimity, *unanimitas*, had a high spiritual value, since harmony was a sign of divine inspiration, while disharmony was considered the devil's work. But unanimity was also desirable for pragmatic reasons, since dissent could hardly be articulated publicly, face to face, without personal loss of honour and the threat of an escalation into violence. In addition, the large weight of hierarchical rank clashed badly with the majority principle, since votes of different social weight cannot be simply counted. If the *maior pars* (the greater part) was not identical to the *sanior pars* (the better or wiser part), there was a serious problem.<sup>20</sup>

So in most early modern assemblies, the procedure usually ran as follows:<sup>21</sup> to begin with, the possibilities of a consensual decision were sounded out confidentially and informally, before the solemn formal meeting was held. Decision-making then functioned according to the polling principle (*Umfrage*): that is, those present were asked for their vote in the order of their rank, and no clear distinction was made between expression of opinion and formal vote. Only when an approximate

majority opinion or a vague consensus had crystallized from the votes did the head of the assembly record this as the result. The assemblies tended to take place in a modus that we can term palaver (which is not meant to be derogatory). That is, the transitions between deliberation, negotiation and decision were completely fluid, and whether a decision would ever be made was uncertain, and even unlikely. The negotiation mode of palaver is generally characteristic of situations in which there is a great deal of pressure to achieve harmony, a strong need for personal face-saving, and low chances of enforcing a result that could possibly also meet dissent. Such a mode of negotiation, as was the rule under pre-modern conditions, also differs from a formalized process of decision-making as prescribed by the Golden Bull insofar as the participants could opt out again and then only submit to the result at the end if it met with their approval or compensation was guaranteed in another matter. In pre-modern assemblies – for example, courts, imperial or other estate diets – that was always a latent risk. For the principle tended to be: what concerns everyone has to be agreed by all.<sup>22</sup> This principle also had a downside, however: namely, those who had not given their approval were also not affected by the result, and

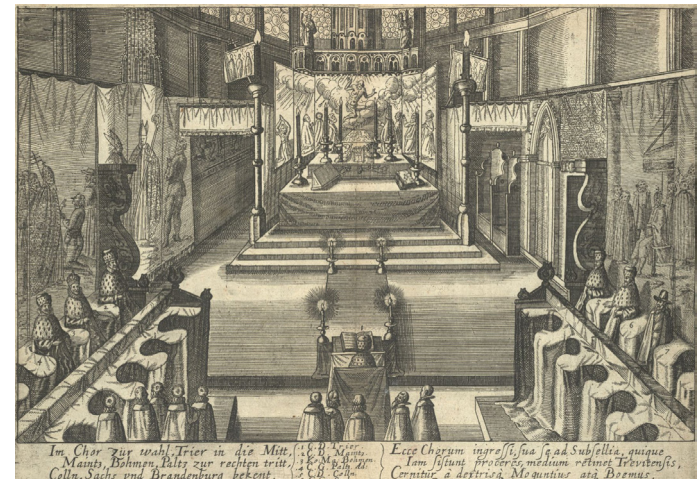
could simply opt out and deny that the decision was binding them. The key point is that as long as there was no monopoly on legitimate physical violence and no effective sanction mechanisms against dissenters, it was difficult to deal with dissent.

This explains the tendency to keep conflicts in a state of limbo, to make opposing views coexist with each other, to endure ambiguity and indecision. But this need not be irrational at all. Conflicts certainly need not be decided. They can also be frozen by hiding the competing positions behind dissimulating formulations so as to overcome such a blockage and to be able at least temporarily to continue to cooperate. In certain circumstances, we can live quite well even with an ambiguous reality. Competing interpretations of a situation can often coexist in the long term, until they perhaps eventually take care of themselves. Such was the case with many law suits in the Roman-German Empire: they only ended when one of the parties involved died out, without any final resolution.

The election of the Roman-German king was therefore quite unusual compared to most other procedures within the Empire. This basic law ensured that a decision would always be made, even against

the background of dissent. The question is why this exception was endured, how this challenge was matched. I want to highlight three points here which characterize the culture of decision-making in the Roman-German Empire: first, the ritual staging of the election that lent it the aura of legitimacy; second, the informal negotiations in advance that would prepare the decision; and, third, the specific value of decision-making for the decision-makers themselves.

First, like all social action, decision-making always has a symbolic dimension. An election is never just an instrumental procedure, but always a symbolic and ritual act as well. It serves not only to identify a person for an office, but also to demonstrate the role of the electors and to stage and reaffirm the entire order in which the election takes place. This was also the case in the election of the king in Germany. It was staged in a time-honoured ritual form as a free and exclusive decision of the prince-electors, and at the same time as a divinely inspired and strictly secret event.





For the period of the election, the location (mostly Frankfurt-am-Main) became a special, enclosed space. All outsiders were excluded and the city gates locked. In the morning, the electors rode in solemn procession to the church, celebrated a mass to the Holy Spirit to ask for His blessing for the election, and swore the prescribed oath to the Gospel. Then they were left to themselves in the electoral chapel where the conclave was held – no one but the Holy Spirit should be among them. Identical chairs were provided for all, symbolizing that, in the electoral act, they were – just this once – equal. The chapel was now, for the act of decision-making, the centre of a completely secret event, with nothing penetrating to the outside. Here, the prince-electors of Mainz asked for the votes in a fixed order and added his own vote at the end. Under the protection of secrecy, possible dissent could be voiced openly, without fear of losing honour.<sup>23</sup> As a rule, though, there were no surprises to be expected in the conclave, since all relevant issues had already been negotiated well in advance. Nevertheless, this act was of essential importance: it staged the election as an act of decision-making by the prince-electors, and indeed all the more effectively since it was completely unobservable to the outside world (which is also true for many other

electoral acts in this period, think of the papal elections up to the present day). At the end of this central act of complete invisibility, the decision made was then presented as the common, unanimous decision of the electoral body as a whole. The doors of the electoral chapel were opened and the one selected solemnly placed on the altar, while the *Te Deum* was sung, drums beaten and trumpets blown, the bells rung and canons fired. Church and city gates were opened, and the ‘entire people’ (*“das ganze Volk”*), which means: the population of Frankfurt) were given the chance to bestow their approval on the election in the ritualized form of *acclamatio*. Gradually, the crowd in the church, in the city and throughout the whole empire were notified of the decision.

Second, as I have already indicated, that certainly does not mean that informal negotiation played no role at all. On the contrary, the ritual staging of a free election was just one side of the coin. The other side was that this decision had usually been carefully negotiated behind the scenes. Even Charles IV, the Emperor who had issued the Golden Bull, was nevertheless accused of having bought the royal election of his son Wenzel through gifts of unprecedented value;<sup>24</sup> and the election of Charles V is said to have involved a million gold

florins. But these were only extreme excesses of a self-evident process of negotiation that took place prior to every election. The candidate's commitments were in fact formally laid down after 1519 in a so-called electoral capitulation. The reigning emperor himself usually took the lead in these negotiations by having his successor elected king and future emperor in his own lifetime. As is well known, this led de facto to all the Roman-German emperors of the early-modern period coming, with one and a half exceptions, from the House of Habsburg. However, that certainly does not mean that the imperial title had become a birth right of the Habsburg dynasty, nor that the "free vote" practised by the prince-electors had become an empty ritual that they could just as well have done without. The election had quite other functions than simply electing the right candidate.

Significant in this context is the fate of an early proposal designed to make the election more rational. In the context of the Basel church council in 1433, the young and later very famous theologian Nicolaus of Cusa had already designed an electoral procedure to eliminate the notorious "fraud and evil machinations" in the royal election and to determine "with the greatest possible certainty" the best candidate.<sup>25</sup> In a written voting

procedure, each voter would compare, order, and score all the candidates together. The points would be added at the end, and the candidate with the highest number of points would win.<sup>26</sup> However, this sophisticated scoring system was never used; indeed, it was completely forgotten about for centuries and was only rediscovered in the late 18th century. This lack of success is at first glance quite surprising, since the procedure was, as today's mathematicians attest, extremely rational. But, on closer inspection, it is no wonder that it did not succeed. Rather, it failed for reasons that are significant, since the learned theologian was victim to a rationalistic misunderstanding when he assumed that the royal election was about achieving a result that was as (mathematically) rational as could be. In a certain way Cusa, in his optimism regarding the power of rationality, made a mistake similar to those made by some theorists on decision-making today: for all his focus on the right result, he overlooked what the decision-making process was otherwise about. Namely, it was not, or at least not only, about the exact and impartial determination of the optimal candidate for office. The whole sacrally excessive and ritualized election procedure that ran according to the rules of the Golden Bull was designed not only

to ensure that a clear and unequivocal decision would be made. It also demonstrated that the election was in accordance with the free will of the prince-electors and no one else. And it highlighted their exclusive right to vote, on which the many other extraordinary privileges of the prince-electors depended, and ultimately also the basic laws of the whole empire. That is why this right to vote always had to be demonstratively practised and affirmed anew.

The election of the king was, along with the subsequent coronation, the virtual keystone that held the whole imperial constitution together. What was involved in formalizing the royal election was nothing less than the production and maintenance of the political unity of the empire. This exemplifies the general fact that the formalization of decision-making goes to the heart of the political. Our understanding of the political is indeed very much influenced by the concept of decision-making: according to a very common definition, an action is *political* that is geared towards the production of collectively binding decisions. A body politic, as a collective whole, emerges and exists precisely through the fact that decisions are collectively attributed and considered as collectively binding. But that is by no

means self-evident. Here, in the case of the election of the king, the emergence of a clearly defined, stable decision-making body was needed for this handful of prince-electors to be able to represent the empire as a whole. And this contributed significantly to the fact that, for centuries, the empire as a political body survived all the dangers of splintering.

#### IV. Conclusion

What I wanted to show can be summarized in the following theses:

1. Decision-making should not be taken for granted; rather, it is a social challenge. Explicit decisions usually require increased legitimation.
2. Under certain circumstances, it may be more sensible not to decide – for example, when there are only limited prospects of enforcing a decision in the face of dissent.  
From a historical perspective, formalized decision-making was therefore more the exception than the rule. Much more common were palaver and dilatory muddling-through.
3. Although this may still seem familiar to us today (think of academic councils), it can hardly be

denied that there has been a long-term process which has made decision-making increasingly likely. For, when there are formalized decision-making procedures (such as prescribed by the Golden Bull in Germany), then these ensure that decision-making definitely takes place. So, in the course of time, more and more issues have become subjects of decision-making: that means, they can be decided but also have to be decided.

4. However, the historical example shows that more formality also produces more informality. Wherever formal procedures make explicit decisions more expectable, the more the need increases for informal negotiations and secret paths.
5. Moreover, the historical example shows that such formalized procedures have not only the function of producing rational results. Rather, they also have more implicit, symbolic functions. For example, decisions often serve to stabilize symbolically the entire institution that produces them.
6. What apparently increased in the modern era around 1800 is a hitherto unknown optimism

concerning the human capacity to shape and perfect this world rationally. “Rational decisions are the sacred cows of modernity”.<sup>27</sup> With that, we have manoeuvred ourselves into a dilemma: the lower (due to the complexity of the global world) the real prospect of rational decision-making is, the higher also is the expectation that rational decision-making is both necessary and possible. This can only lead to disappointment.

What I wanted to show is that looking at earlier epochs can stop us falling into the self-imposed trap of unfulfillable expectations of rationality. In this respect, a certain detached sobriety can be quite useful for the present.

## Illustrations

Fig.1: Weighing of Souls (Hans Memling, *The Last Judgment*, ca. 1470)

Fig.2: Weighing of reason (Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, in: Johann Bernhard Basedow, *Elementarwerk*, 1774)

Fig.3: The Good and the Evil Way (Geoffroy Tory, Champ Fleury, Paris 1529)

Fig.4: The Broad and the Narrow way (Charlotte Reihlen, painting by Paul Beckmann)

Fig.5: Buridan's Ass (Armgarde von Arnim, *Der Traum des glücklichen Esels*, in: Album für Anastasie, 1856, by kind permission of the Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurter Goethe-Museum)

Fig.6: Golden Bull, Emperor and Electors sitting *in maiestate* (Prague illuminated manuscript of the Golden Bull, ca 1400, by kind permission of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

Fig.7: Electoral procession (in: *Wahl undt Krönung des aller durchleuchtigsten, großmechtigsten unüberwindlichsten Fürsten und herrn, herr matthiae I., erwehlten Römischen Kayzers etc. undt Ihrer Kay. May. Gemahlin etc. in schönen Kupferstucken abgebildet*, Frankfurt/Main 1612)

Fig.8: Electors in the election chapel (in: *Wahl undt Krönung des aller durchleuchtigsten, großmechtigsten unüberwindlichsten Fürsten und herrn, herr Matthiae I., erwehlten Römischen Kayzers etc. undt Ihrer Kay. May. Gemahlin etc. in schönen Kupferstucken abgebildet*, Frankfurt/Main 1612)



## References

<sup>1</sup> See the programme of the Collaborative Research Group 1150 'Cultures of Decision-Making' (SFB 1150 'Kulturen des Entscheidens') at the University of Münster: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/SFB1150/en/index.html>; for several short historical case studies from the early modern period, see Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Gabriele Haug-Moritz, Birgit Emich, André Krischer, Matthias Pohlig, Philip Hoffmann-Rehnitz, 'Praktiken des Entscheidens', in Arndt Brendecke (ed.), *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit. Akteure – Handlungen – Artefakte* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, 2015), pp. 630-683.

<sup>2</sup> "Im Paradies gibt es keine Entscheidungsprobleme!" Rudolf Grünig and Richard Kühn, *Entscheidungs-verfahren für komplexe Probleme. Ein heuristischer Ansatz*, 4th edn (Berlin and Heidelberg, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> "Das Paradies war der Ort für einen Modellversuch in genau dieser Frage; und die Welt verdankt einer mutigen Frau die Folgen des Normbruchs: Unterscheidungsvermögen und Freiheit." Niklas Luhmann, 'Kausalität im Süden', *Soziale Systeme* 1/1 (1995), pp. 7-28.

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