The notion of moral cost. Sacrifice and self-sacrifice as a structural dimension of moral life

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Abstract
How to live in a better world? How to get out of Hell (war, poverty, nature destruction)? To produce a better world implies, as any production, a production cost and therefore to produce a better world implies a specific cost that can be called a moral cost. Indeed the very structure of moral discourse has much to do with the economic semantics. However whereas a fair economy tries to supply benefit for all (in a win-win game), there are some situations where such a mutually advantageous structure is not possible. It is such situations that the paper aims to grasp in particular with the help of the lifeboat thought-experiment. In these situations we are facing the necessity of sacrifice, either sacrifice of others, or self-sacrifice. The paper will also show that the notion of self-sacrifice is able to reconcile the teleological ethical approach with the deontological one.


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THE NOTION OF MORAL COST:
SACRIFICE AND SELF-SACRIFICE
AS A STRUCTURAL DIMENSION OF MORAL LIFE

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We have all too many opportunities to ask the very simple question: how to live in a better world? The answer should not be extremely sophisticated, if we have in mind that for producing any good or service there is a production cost. To produce a better world would therefore imply a sort of specific cost I’ll suggest to call moral cost. But this statement is far from being obvious and needs a theoretical investigation as some leading contemporary moral theories deny any relevance to anything else than benefit. These theories assume that we can ameliorate our present state of affairs without paying anything. I believe this is basically an illusion even if in some very definite situations it may prove to be true. Instead, I’ll try to argue that to ameliorate the moral and material state of the world (or, in a more religious wording, to get out of Hell), some sort of cost is unavoidable.

As an evidence of this, let’s have a brief look of certain terms we find in Luke’s gospel:

| to lend | chap. 6, 34 |
| treasury | 12, 34; 21, 1; 18, 22 |
| creditor | 7, 41; |
| rich man | 16, 1; 16, 19; 21, 1; 19,2; 18, 23-25 |
| advantage | 9, 25 |
| to save | 9, 56 |
| to pay | 10, 35 |
| debtor | 7, 41; 16, 5 |
| to sell | 12, 33 |
| silver | 15, 8 |
| goods | 11, 21; 15, 12; 16,1; 19, 8 |

We can ask why the biblical teaching relies so much on economic vocabulary. There is a first answer which points out the educational advantage of adopting it: as we all know rather well some elementary economic operations (to sell, to buy, to have debts, etc.), those may constitute a sphere of common knowledge useful to an innovative message about a reality which is not economic but which shares some important features with it.

The main point is to demonstrate that economic activity and morality do share some common features. In this respect we can say that both moral and economic behaviours are social behaviours. Beside, economy is a human activity which is immediately imregnated with rules, some of them purely technical but some others being true moral rules. However, the main explanation to the economic semantic structure of ethical discourse has to do with the anthropological reality. Wealth and money - money being together the sign and the means of wealth - are strong anthropo-
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Political topoi where man deeply invests himself and where his libido is engaged. Wealth and money, as also power and sex, are places upon which value is conferred. This very concept of value is probably the one which gives a unity to the two distinct spheres of morality and of economics. As the gospels say: "Where is your treasury, there is your heart".

If we follow N. Luhmann's semantic theory, we can say that any semantic structuration has a binary code which has two values, a positive one and a negative one. The two basic binary values of the ethical semantics are of course good and evil. The two basic binary values of the economic system are profitable/not profitable. What is profitable (the positive and attractive value) may be called good from the economic point of view. Thus there is a sort of homology between the general concepts of ethics and those of economics, although these two social and semantic fields are distinct. This homology, which is justified by the centrality of the concept of value, allows quite a number of rhetorical figures. As the biblical discourse displays it, it is possible to speak about ethical (or existential or eschatological) matters by using economic terms, as it is possible to speak rhetorically about the whole in terms of the part (synecdoche). This rhetorical device may prove to be an efficient one since it allows to speak about rather difficult and abstract matters with the words borrowed to a well-known and concrete field of human activity. As a matter of fact, not only the economic wording of ethics has always been a discursive strategy but, moreover, it is possible to suggest that economic reasoning has taken the entire place of ethical reasoning in some modern rational ethical theories, as if the part was considered as the whole. I'll come back later on this subject.

It is in this context that I'll develop some comments about the notion of moral cost. Cost is of course a typical economic concept which designates a negative value: in the economic perspective, costs have to be lowered in so far as possible, or even suppressed. Cost is the contrary of benefit. Both variables move in opposite directions: if costs can be lowered, benefits can be increased.

Cost belongs to the same semantic family as disadvantage, disutility, loss, deprivation, whereas benefit belongs to the same semantic family as advantage, interest, preference, satisfaction, utility and we could add pleasure and happiness to this list.

By moral cost, I mean any disadvantage or suffering which is generated by a human action. I could be more precise in saying that moral cost is any disadvantage or suffering generated by an explicit or implicit morally grounded human action. However this second formulation is somewhat redundant since human action has always at least an implicit moral dimension.

Moral cost can be an internal moral cost, that is a cost the moral agent suffers himself because of his own decisions and deeds. It can also be an external moral cost, one which is inflicted to other people than the moral agent. An example of internal cost are the sufferings and deprivations an ascetic person inflicts to himself. The famous free-rider is an example of a (im)moral agent inflicting an external moral cost to those who pay for a collective good. A sadist is of course an extreme example of a moral agent taking his pleasure by inflicting sufferings to others.

VALUE, SENSE AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL POSTULATE

How does it happen that we value something? The fact that we value ourselves, fact which generates, at a reflexive level, the ethical theories of hedonism or of self-interest, is deeply rooted in human and even biological reality. As a biological system, man is naturally inclined to keep his corporal integrity over time. Moreover, satisfying basic needs brings sensual feelings and pleasures, what certainly helps the reproduction of the biological entity.

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1. It would be interesting to study more carefully the use of economic vocabulary in psychoanalysis (transfer, investment).
2. Concerning an account of Luhmann's sociology of the economic system, see W. Ossipow (1994).
4. In J. M. Buchanan and G. Tullock (1962), The Calculus of Consent. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, p.45, external costs are defined as "costs that the individual expects to endure as a result of the actions of others over which he has no direct control".

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The value of ourselves, as it is the closest to our natural condition, is together the basic moral sentiment and the most primitive one. Moral theories have long recognized that man is essentially linked to his own happiness, whatever we understand under this rather vague notion. The taking into account of this very fundamental fact, which I call the anthropological postulate, has given rise to the important teleological ethical tradition (Aristotle, Bentham). Strong empirical evidence back this anthropological postulate so that even such a radical deontologist philosopher as was Kant acknowledges his validity, not at the level of the moral principles of practical reason, but at the empirical and pragmatically level. The moral philosophies which rely on the anthropological postulate as a starting point and which assume that the natural tendency it expresses is to be honoured as the true telos of human life, leave little room for moral cost. Mainly, they consider that moral costs, either internal or external, should be eliminated in the same way as any suffering has to be eliminated.

Another philosophical view on the anthropological postulate considers it as a simple and primitive stage in moral development. More elaborate stages appear in the course of development as, for instance the taking into account of the utility for the community (family, social group, nation); the equal rights of every person; the mutual advantage; the universalization principle; the priority of others over myself (Lévinas). All these different moral views depart from the basic anthropological postulate by constructing rather abstract and culturally elaborated principles. The important point here is that these moral theories underline the fact that there are actually many ways and principles which may direct moral orientations. One’s own well-being and happiness are only one of them.

I would like to argue that man does not behave according to self-interest but according to what makes sense for him. It is true that our own survival or happiness has a strong appeal and empirically very often constitutes the only reality which makes sense for us. But here again we are confronted to the fallacy of confusing the area of the part with the area of the whole. If, without any doubt, the search for happiness makes sense, all that makes sense is not reducible to one’s own happiness. I am now going to examine what the rational moral theories have to say about the problem of moral cost. Under rational moral theories I understand these theories which rely on the social choice theory and on game theory. I’ll take more specifically the example of David Gauthier’s Morals by Agreement whose contractualism is a good example of modern rational moral theory.

THE RATIONAL MORAL THEORIES (RMT) AND THE PROBLEM OF MORAL COST

A) CONTRACTARIANISM

As a first principle, contractualism includes morality in a larger area, the area of rationality. Gauthier writes that moral principles are a subset of rational principles of choice (1986, 4). It means that there is no contradiction between acting rationally and acting morally. “We are committed to showing why an individual, reasoning from non-moral premises, would accept the constraints of morality on his choice” (1986, 5). All what is rational is not moral, but, for Gauthier and contractualists like Rawls, the only morality which has to be taken into consideration by contractualism is a rational one.

It must be underlined here that the desire of making a rational ethical theory has always been the task of most philosophers from Aristotle to Bentham, Mill, Kant, Habermas and many others. What is specific in the RMT is the very narrow definition of rationality, which is close to the economic definition. For Rawls “free and rational persons further their own interests” (Rawls, 1972, §3, 11). Gauthier is still much more clear on this subject: “...in so far as the interests of others are not affected, a person acts rationally if and only if she seeks her greatest interest or benefit” (1986, 6-7). Since morality is considered as a part of rationality, no moral act can be against the interests of the moral agent. Internal moral costs are banned from the contractualist perspective as are banned external costs inflicted to others. This view of ratio-

5. See Kohlberg (1981); Habermas (1983).
nality is a mere development of the anthropological postulate, namely that man seeks his own happiness. The contractualist conception implies a total respect for these enlightened and liberal categories such as individual autonomy and freedom. And it seems quite obvious that a rational person cannot accept, cannot give his consent to something which is against his interests, his preferences, his utility, etc. A rational person, defined as someone who necessarily seeks his greatest interest or benefit, cannot but try to avoid any internal cost. Problems arise in the course of interactions between rational people, each of them seeking their greatest interests. In the first place what is morally forbidden, although it could be considered as rational, is to obtain a benefit at the cost of someone else. To rob, for instance, would be to deny the autonomy, the property rights and the freedom of others and to consider them as means, not as ends. Moreover, in an utilitarian perspective, the fact of robbing, if it were generalized, would make prevail a state of war in society very similar to Hobbes’ state of nature. The generalized insecurity would very soon prove to be contrary even to the robber’s own interests. A second case is to neglect any interaction with others, if in this situation the benefit proves to be greater than it would be in an interaction. The third case is specifically the theme of contractarianism. In this case, society is considered as a cooperative venture. Game theory, and especially the famous prisoner’s dilemma, shows that in quite a number of situations it is more rational to cooperate than to act individually. This means that the benefit of cooperation is greater than the benefit of acting individually. Quoting the philosopher Kurt Baier, Gauthier writes: “The very raison d’être of a morality is to yield reasons which overrule the reasons of self-interest in those cases when everyone’s following self-interest would be harmful to everyone” (1986, 10). If we understand Gauthier’s reasoning correctly, it is rational to act cooperatively because it provides a greater benefit than acting individually, the benefit of mutual cooperation. It is rational because it provides such a benefit. Therefore, it is not against, or even not beyond self-interest that people are acting. It is obviously in their own interest to cooperate. The initial definition of rationality and the requirement of including morality in the sphere of rationality do not allow to go conceptually beyond self-interest and philosophically to reach a much higher moral stage than the one implied by the anthropological postulate. The limits of such a view of ethics are obvious and Gauthier stresses them himself: “A contractarian account of morals has no place for duties that are strictly redistributive in their effects, transferring but not increasing benefits, or duties that do not assume reciprocity from other persons. Such duties would be neither rationally based, nor supported by considerations of impartiality.” (Gauthier, 1986, 16). “Our theory denies any place to rational constraint, and so to morality, outside the context of mutual benefit” (ibid.). To come back to the initial question I raised at the beginning of this paper, the world can be made better, according to contractarianism, only by a cooperative behaviour inside a social structure of cooperation which completely excludes the notion of moral cost except in considering it as something which has to be lowered or suppressed.

B) UTILITARIANISM

Utilitarianism shares with other RMT a certain number of presuppositions. First the belonging of morality to the sphere of rationality. Harsanyi does not say anything else than Gauthier when he states: “moral behaviour itself is a special form of rational behaviour” (1982, 40). Second, as it is well-known, utilitarianism considers the anthropological postulate as a necessary premiss of moral reasoning. But utilitarianism underlines much more than contractarianism the notion of common interest, whereas contractarianism only speaks of the mutual benefit of individuals derived from cooperation. Harsanyi considers that “a rational pursuit of common human and humane interests (...) is the very essence of morality” (1982, 41).

Rawls and the deontologist philosophers blame utilitarianism for accepting that the rights of some people could be violated or their utility diminished if this violation or this reduction would allow a higher net benefit for the community (or for the greatest number). From a deontologist point of view there is no doubt that this criticism is quite correct. But the
point I wish to raise is the following: utilitarianism has had the great merit to demonstrate that in certain circumstances cooperation generating mutual benefit is not possible. In such situations, if it is considered as desirable (for instance by the community, or the society, or the State) to improve the general situation, then this improvement cannot be obtained without incurring a cost to some people. This point of view, as I just said, is highly criticizable from a deontologist point of view. But the utilitarian acceptance of moral cost throws a lucid light on certain types of moral situations which are completely overshadowed by contractarianism. Thus the great merit of utilitarianism over contractarianism is to have underlined the fact that moral cost is an unavoidable consequence of acting in certain well-defined situations. Human action is not necessarily set in a cooperative frame and we must take into consideration the fact that the satisfaction of some people can be obtained only if it is accepted that other people suffer a cost.

This acceptance of a moral cost makes utilitarianism a paradigmatic case for what Jean-Pierre Dupuy calls a sacrificial logic (Dupuy, 1992, 145), a logic which sacrifices the benefit of some to ensure the satisfaction of the others. Dupuy quotes in this context a very meaningful passage of John’s gospel:

“You know nothing at all. Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11, 49-50 in Dupuy, 1992, 147).

In its religious origins, sacrifice meant the acceptance of losing something valuable in order to obtain the favours of the Gods. Without this sacrifice, the situation could not be favourably solved. Far from these remote times, the same reasoning still holds. During the war, for instance, it is widely accepted that the bombing of several thousands of civilians (like in Hiroshima, Nagasaki or Dresden) is morally justified if it may help to put an end to war and then save some hundreds of thousands of lives. Civilians are sacrificed on the altars of the future victory and peace. The common good, the general interest, the public utility, the reason of State, all these are formulations which have widely allowed the display of the sacrificial logic.

I have now to examine more carefully the structural and moral features of those situations which require the sacrificial logic. For this purpose I will present a short narrative which has already been very widely used in moral theory6, in a way or another, and which I’ll call the lifeboat case.

THE LIFEBOAT CASE

Imagine that a boat has sunk following a terrible storm. In a lifeboat ten castaways have found place. Unfortunately the lifeboat is a tiny one and it proves to be overloaded with ten persons. It will sink at its turn if it cannot be unweighted. It is obvious than someone has to leave the lifeboat in order to save it and to save the nine remaining castaways. It is also obvious that the person who will leave the boat will hopelessly perish.

What can be decided in such a situation? Let us imagine a few possibilities:

a) The ten castaways are so frightened that nobody is able to do anything and the lifeboat sinks with the ten persons. It is a case of extreme and general anomie which is not the most likely one.

b) The ten castaways are able to evaluate correctly the situation and to take the appropriate means to face it. They may begin, for instance, to ask whether there is a volunteer who would agree to jump into the sea and perish. In any perspective which assumes the anthropological postulate as a behavioural principle, we can expect that this appeal to volunteering will receive no answer.

c) If there is no volunteer, somebody must be designated to be sacrificed for the sake of the others. Then the ten persons may agree upon a procedure, like drawing lots. If the anthropological postulate works, then everybody hopes to be in a free-riding position, where he or she will benefit from the sacrifice of somebody else without suffering any personal cost since, as mentioned earlier, the free-rider favours external costs put on other people than himself rather than internal cost. In this case, although the castaways have agreed with a procedure, it is obvious that the person who is designated by the fate will not consent to the result, because he accepted the procedure while

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6. Dupuy quotes a rather similar narrative from Helvetius' De l'esprit (Dupuy, 1992, 120); the same narrative as I present here is to be found in Paul Lucardie (1990, 59).
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hoping that somebody else would be designated. This is the procedural solution.

d) It is possible that because of too much confusion on the lifeboat or because of lack of
time or for any other reasons, some of the castaways (for instance the eldest, or the strongest) decide in a few minutes and without any possible appeal to decide themselves who will be thrown into the sea. This is the political solution which is the most likely if the free-
rider phenomenon appears with the result of the procedure. As usual, politics, understood
as the appropriation of power in a social group, has a central place in the process of
obtaining a collective good. Power is the most common mean of enforcing general will in
cases of disagreement about collective decisions or free-riding behaviours.

Solutions c) and d) are consistent with the utilitarian and sacrificial logic. Any solution
which will have beneficial consequences for nine out of ten persons will be accepted by those
who survive. These solutions will receive, at least a posteriori, a moral justification from
the part of the survivors. But it is quite clear that solution c) and d) are not acceptable from a
deaontological point of view according to which the autonomy and the rights of any
moral agent have to be absolutely respected.

On the other hand, this absolute respect may lead to a form of anomic which prevents any
solution to be found. As it is likely that people prefer surviving rather than perishing, an
extreme and radical deaontologist position will indirectly lead to the political solution.

e) If we refuse the strict deaontologist solution because ten people will perish, what is an
absurdity from a (human) consequentialist point of view; and if we also refuse the proce-
dural and the political solutions because the designated person is not able to give his or her
consent to the sacrifice, then there is only one available solution which supposes to falsify
the anthropological postulate according to which a moral agent necessarily further his own interests. Only if there is one volunteer is it possible to reconcile the consequentialist and common sense moral view with the deaontological requirements of absolute respect of the
rights and autonomy of the moral agents. Self-sacrifice is this solution. It is not rational in the sense that it is not consistent with the

anthropological postulate. On the other hand, one can say it is rational in the sense that it is
a mean perfectly adapted to the goal. If the goal is a complex one, involving both the
consequentialist perspective of saving people and the deaontologist requirement of absolute
respect of all persons, self-sacrifice could well be the only acceptable solution. It is accept-
able in the consequentialist logic of utilitarianism since self-sacrifice provides the greatest
benefit to the greatest number, although is not likely that supererogatory virtues will suddenly
flourish in the milieu of an utilitarian culture which relies on the anthropological postulate?

Solution e) is the acceptance by someone of self-sacrifice. The volunteer knows he will
die. It supposes that the anthropological postulate has been overridden and that the moral
agent is moved by a moral ethos which gives sense to this heroic supererogatory behaviour.

The conclusion of the lifeboat case is that sacrifice is, in this particular situation, unavoi-
dable: either there is the sacrifice of an innocent and unwilling person through the procedural or political solutions, or there is the self-
sacrifice and supererogatory solution (Heyd, 1982). The fact is that there must be structur-
ally at least one sacrificial victim if the whole “people” has not to perish. The procedural
and political solutions rely on external cost inflicted to an unwilling and innocent person.
The self-sacrifice supererogatory solution relies on internal cost suffered by the moral
agent himself. In both cases the structure of the situation does not allow to improve the
situation (or to get out of Hell) without at least one person bearing a cost.

THE LIFE-BOAT CASE:
ANECDOCTAL OR STRUCTURAL?

An important question is to decide if the lifeboat case is a quite singular and anecdotal one or
if it displays some fundamental features of moral life. I’ll argue that the second possibili-
ty is the right one. My argument will be two-
fold: first I’ll show that the moral consciousness of mankind has always taken sacrifice and self-sacrifice seriously. Second, I’ll try to
argue on a more rational level.

7. In his A Theory of Justice § 76, Rawls expresses serious doubts about the ability of utilitarianism to generate strong enough altruistic sentiments which could make sacrifice acceptable.
a) Contrary to contractarianism, which aims at minimizing moral cost, external and internal, religions have always had the conception that sacrifice is a necessary dimension of moral life. In particular the Christian-Jewish tradition has been fully aware of this fundamental structure. The basic experience which leads human people to moral thinking has been, and is probably still to-day, the experience of evil. We all face evil as a bare fact, as brute empirical data. What the Christian dogma (or myth as would say the social scientists) calls the original sin may be understood as the presence of evil, chronologically from the dawn of mankind up to now, but also at a structural level. Hell is another dogmatic-mythical concept which designates a world where there would be no hope to get out of the structural sovereignty of evil. How to get out of Hell is a basic moral question. The religious answer has been salvation, the overcoming of evil and, in the religious thought, salvation was very often mediated by sacrifice. In the Christian religion, the mediation of salvation through sacrifice (and through Christ’s self-sacrifice) occupies a central and structural place. Religious sacrifices were aimed at calming down the Gods, their anger and their cruelty. It was a sort of an exchange between men and the divinities, a deal where the human part has to give something dear or valuable in order to catch the heavenly favours, mercy or pardon. The most valuable things to give to the Gods were of course human lives. Abraham himself was ready to honour this custom and, after he heard the word of God, he was about to commit a human sacrifice with his own beloved son Isaac. But finally God did not allow Isaac’s death and ordered that a lamb should be substituted to the boy on the altar. This famous narrative has a great spiritual significance. First it means that sacrifice is not abolished, that it keeps its validity as a fundamental religious act. But, in the second place, the substitution of the lamb to Isaac means that sacrifice has no longer to be understood as the slaughter of innocent and unwilling people but as a spiritual disposition of mind to consent to a cost, however great, in order to be faithful to God’s will.

In a way, Christ’s death is in the same logic. One can say, on one hand, that Jesus was sacrificed by the Jewish priests to save the whole nation. But Jesus was conscious to accomplish his father’s will and to be together Isaac and the lamb. However, contrary to Isaac, but very much like the obeying Abraham, Jesus agreed with his dramatic fate, he recognized it as God’s will. Thus the logic of Christ’s acceptance of the cross was the deontological obedience to his father and the consequentialist conviction that the salvation of the sinners had to be mediated by his own death. In the primitive religions, humans were frequently sacrificed to the divinities. In the Christian religion, which carries on the Jewish moral and spiritual tradition, man and God altogether have to sacrifice themselves in order to save the world from evil and to restore the reign of love. If such an extreme moral requirement as the acceptance of his own death is necessary, it is certainly proportional to the extent of evil as a structural dimension of human life.

b) The rational argument. The moral structure of self-sacrifice I advocate in the case of the lifeboat situation is the following:
- somebody obtains a satisfaction only at the expense of somebody else;
- the person who bears the cost does it willingly;
- the person who bears the cost does not receive anything in exchange from the beneficiary.

These three features point out the fact that we have to do with a transfer, a benefit allocated to somebody without any counterpart. It is not a merchant exchange, neither a cooperation leading to mutual benefit. In the lifeboat case, the very idea of exchange is without any significance since the person who accepts to bear the cost knows he/she will die. Moreover nobody in the boat is able to exchange anything. The situation is structurally dramatic precisely because no exchange can take place. Let’s imagine that one very rich castaway could buy his rescue with gold or money by hiring an helicopter. This one would not need the self-sacrifice of one of his fellows. Those who need self-sacrifice are those who cannot give anything in exchange. They are the real poor and cooperation with them is by no means attractive because there will be no mutual benefit.
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Let's take the example of somebody who is very seriously ill or disabled. He or she is dependent from the good-will of others. The more he or she is ill or disabled, the more care and attention will be needed. Only rich people can "buy" the necessary services. The others, the poor, can't give anything in exchange.

Transfer is necessary when there is a disequilibrium between people, for instance when there are extremely poor people or nations beside rich ones. Transfer is a means to compensate this disequilibrium, probably the only means in many cases. When people are suffering, they are victims (of poverty, of illness, etc.). The condition of victim, or of potential victim like the ten castaways, is, as Otfrid Höffe underlines it, a universal one (Höffe, 1991, 258). Not only are the young children or elderly people very obvious potential victims, but we all are. Since to be a victim implies that there is a suffering, a state of the world which has to be changed without the possibility of cooperation, transfer is necessary. Höffe speaks of the "anthropological need for help" (ibid., 268). Ancient and modern societies alike rely on a form or another of solidarity, which could be defined as a global way of organizing transfers from the well-off to the actual or potential victims. Modern and "organic" forms of solidarity (Durkheim), such as the social security systems, which deal with billions of francs or dollars, exemplify the economic dimension of transfers morally grounded in the anthropological need for help.

I hope having suggested that there are human situations where cooperation, in the sense of a social relationship which generates mutual benefit, is not possible. These situations have evil as a central feature: extreme poverty, illness, shortage, emergency, etc. In these cases people are in some way excluded from the normal networks of exchange and therefore from the benefits of exchange. I would like to quote again a passage from Gauthier in order to demonstrate that from a contractarian point of view, self-sacrifice and supererogation are strictly irrelevant: "A contractarian account of morals has no place for duties that are strictly redistributive in their effects, transferring but not increasing benefits, or duties that do not assume reciprocity from other persons. Such duties would be neither rationally based, nor supported by considerations of impartiality" (Gauthier, 1986, 16). The very liberal Morals by Agreement is totally blind to the ethical dimension of transfer and self-sacrifice that a deeply imbalanced world requires.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I wish to raise two points: the relevance of an ethical theory of self-sacrifice or of supererogation for social, economic and political affairs. And, second, the importance of considering ethics not only in its theoretical dimension but as a culture (Marxists would say an ideology).

At first sight it seems that self-sacrifice is an old fashioned concept, which fits in religious thought but which has no relevance in a modern, rationalized world. As a matter of fact, the rational moral theories have powerfully given substance to this view in their insistence upon benefit for everybody. According to me, self-sacrifice and supererogation have to be rehabilitated either in theory as Urmson (1958) and Heyd (1982) began to do it, or as moral, and then cultural, horizon. Supererogation is generally defined as "acts which go beyond the call of duty" (Heyd, 1982, 1). This definition is not quite satisfying because in certain circumstances it could be paradoxically considered as a duty to go beyond duty. Anyway, the scope of supererogation very much depends on the definitions and the extension given to moral duties. The rational moral theories do not deal with such concepts as heroism or sanctity. But for the religions there is a strong appeal to people to become saints, almost an obligation. The fact is that modern societies have organised, partially on a compulsory base, the monetary transfers needed by social solidarity and the functioning of the social security systems. This at least points out the fact that transfers are necessary and that cooperation for mutual benefit does not work in the social tasks. In this example, a sacrifice is required from the rich in favour of the poor, from the healthy in favour of the sick people, from those who have a job in favour of the unemployed. The problem of

9. It is interesting to underline that, according to Heyd (1982, 1), "the Latin etymology of the term supererogation refers to the act of paying out more than is required or demanded". This is an additional evidence of the link between the semantics of economy and the semantics of morality.
social transfers is so important for the social and political stability that the moral obligation of solidarity has become a legal obligation. In other fields, sacrifice under the form of transfer has not yet reached the point of becoming a legal obligation. I can give the example of North-South economic relations. We know that Third World countries are producers of commodities such as natural gas, coffee, cocoa, etc., which are sold on the market at market price. Except during rather short periods, the market price has not been able in the past to prevent the Third World countries to suffer a severe deterioration of the terms of trade. Solidarity does not exist at a global level and there is no organization of massive transfers from the rich countries to the poorest. However I would like to remind an initiative of President Mitterrand when he was fresh elected at the beginning of the eighties. He decided that the French public owned agency Gaz de France would buy the Algerian natural gas well above world market prices. Another experiment of supererogatory economic behaviour which presently takes place in a certain number of rich countries is the retail sale of some third world products above the average retail price in order to be able to pay to the producers what is considered as a “just price”. In Switzerland, for instance, the market share of “fair trade” coffee is around 5%. So is it for honey. Moreover, it is intended to extend the “fair trade” project to such products as tea, chocolate and bananas.

It is of great interest to compare the failure of the Mitterrand project for the Algerian gaz with the success of the “fair trade” experiment. In the first case, the decision to be virtuous (i.e. to pay the product above market price) came from “above”. It was a political decision, inflicting the whole burden of the extra-cost on one (public) firm. Sacrifice was then heavily felt and proved to be unbearable. In the case of the “fair trade”, the extreme dispersal of the extra-cost on thousands of consumers enables the sacrifice being almost unnoticed or, if noticed, being quite acceptable because the amount of this extra-cost is very small for the individual consumer. In these conditions, supererogatory virtues can be exercised without any suffering, which of course helps their diffusion in society. At the psychological level, we are of course far from the dramatic life-boat case where sacrifice culminates into death. But at the structural level, we find in the life-boat case and in the fair trade experiment the basic economic and moral structure of the transfer from the well-off to the victims of evil.

My second point deals with the link between morality and culture. Culture is not only a sum of knowledge but it is a set of representations which give orientation to the acts performed by individuals. The sense according to which people act is provided by the culture which inhabits people’s minds. Social systems integrate individual practices in the body of institutions. Between practices and institutions there is a sort of dialectical link where practices are largely moulded by institutions which, in their turn, can be shaped by innovative initiatives from the social agents. It is therefore quite normal that in a society based on liberal institutions, a culture of cooperation and mutual benefit has developed and gives to the individuals a specific sense to their practices. There is a strong congruence between the objective ethos of the institutions of liberal society and the subjective ethos (ideology, system of representations) of the people, largely based on the anthropological postulate. However, there is only a very tiny congruence - if at all - between the liberal institutions and culture on one hand and the ethics of supererogation and self-sacrifice on the other. Supererogation cannot be rooted in a culture which promotes the anthropological postulate at the first place. For supererogation to be an effective and motivating theory it is necessary that it is embedded into a whole system of representations, into a culture. Up to now, the great religions have been among the major vehicles of such a culture.

I suggest to call hot moralities those which have the two following features:

1. they have strong symbolic or poetic presuppositions, pertaining to mythical or religious significations. For instance, it is presupposed that God does exist, that he speaks to human beings and gives them

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10. Cf. the Geneva daily Le Courrier 27-28 May 1995. A Dutch foundation named Max Havelaar, active in a few European countries, is devoted to promoting and marketing third world products at a fair price.

11. It must be added that the fair trade project launched by the Max Havelaar foundation would not have had such a success without the cooperation of the main retail stores.
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commandments. Both the narratives about Abraham and about Christ illustrate this first feature;
• they are quite demanding on the normative level. As they feature exemplary characters like saints or heroes, they require from people to behave in the same way. And people are supposed to find in the symbolic presuppositions the moral resources to act according to the models and to comply with the strong obligations.

I suggest to call cold moralities those which have the two following features (opposed to those of hot moralities):
• a weak symbolic set of presuppositions and a rational way of arguing. The anthropological postulate and the RMT share this feature.
• they have little demand at the normative level. Only the demands consistent with the rational presuppositions and arguments have their place. That is why the ethical and legal concepts of contract (which is an obligation given by the agents to themselves), or the concept of rights\(^{12}\), are quite fitted to a cold morality.

If the present state of the world, including the socio-economic field, needs, as I tried to argue in this paper, a morality close to supererogation and an ethical theory which takes into account internal moral costs, what is necessary is a cultural change which should develop a symbolic motivating set of representations and which should add moral value to the cold (but nevertheless valuable) rights and contracts moralities.

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12. J.Raz considers that the right-based moral theories are ‘impoverished’ theories because they neglect virtue, supererogation and excellency. There is of course a congruence between my concept of cold morality and the concept of impoverished moral theory. Cf Raz, Joseph (1984)."Right-based Moralities". In: WALDRON, Jeremy, (ed) Theories of Rights. Oxford University Press.


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