

Morality is Short-sighted

«Men are vicious only because they only think about the present.. »

D'Holbach.

The immoral is most often what a short-term vision suggests... Thus theft which immediately seems advantageous for the thief. An obvious advantage at first, but whose charm nevertheless diminishes as soon as the author of the theft takes into account the possible reprisals of his victims (in societies without a state) or the action of the representatives of the law (in societies with a state). And the proverb reminds us that "ill-gotten gains never profit").

From a social point of view – and the societies that pre-exist and survive individuals, represent, to the rather

small extent that they understand them, the long-term interests of the species – theft is dangerous because of the material insecurity that it creates as an uncontrolled mode of exchange, of the uncertainties and disorders that it introduces and in particular of the practices of vendetta that it arouses. The same is obviously true of murder.

Injustice is another example of a deficient consideration of the medium and long term. On the one hand in that those who find themselves robbed will one day find a way to take their revenge so that all that has been said above about theft and murder applies again. On the other hand in that the despoiler will himself end up (or his descendants) falling on the side of the despoiled, so that over time, despoilers and despoiled exchange their roles while beyond this historical game of musical chairs, injustice persists as an abstract, harmful and painful structure.

Conversely, Charity and Solidarity aim at the medium and long term - and the proverb insists on this: "A good deed is never lost" - but this is more generally

the case with all the virtues which enjoin us with constancy of sacrificing the virgin, the vivacious and the beautiful today for an altogether uncertain future.

Why do we need the help of morality to remind us of the demands of the long term?

This is because long-term requirements are related to rare events, while short-term requirements are related to frequent events. Hence it is not useful to recall what frequent repetition ensures that it will not be forgotten. And so, biological evolution has led to our perception of short-term (ie, frequent) demands being more acute, precise, efficient, and compelling than our perception of medium- and long-term demands.

In this sense, the short term (i.e., in a way, "evil") must take precedence over the long term (i.e., in a way, "good"), so that Satan would well indeed be Prince of this World but we should not complain too much about it. In such a way that evil also appears basically as a somewhat short-lived good, a good with a low view, out of place, inadequate, and to put it better, out of sync...

It is now readily admitted that sexual jealousy is an elaboration of "natural selection", but it is less realized that the tendencies opposed to it are equally so. Both are necessary although apparently and logically contradictory.

On closer inspection, "everything happens as if" we were driven by repertoires of behavior from different, and so to speak sedimentary, deposits of Biological Evolution.

In some Evolutionary circumstances, sexual jealousy has fulfilled (and still fulfills) a certain set of "functions" and in other contexts (e.g. among Humans and Bonobos) a certain type of opposing behavior has arisen to fulfill other very useful functions (for example the appeasement of social conflicts through sexual relations among the Bonobos).

It is important to clearly understand that the various repertoires of behavior bequeathed to us by biological evolution (and we could no doubt speak more accurately here of behavioral attractors) do not need to be coherent. It suffices that they are useful over geological periods,

during which, depending on adverse circumstances, the implementation of opposing and contradictory solutions can prove valuable for the survival of a species.

Considering things well, it would even be quite harmful for these repertoires of behavior to be coherent, quite simply because History – the vagaries of which they are used to deal with – is itself neither logical nor coherent. And also – as shown by the setting to work of random mutations of certain gene sequences in the functioning of our immune system – because you have to carry within yourself a certain amount of chaos to be able to face the chaos.

And as with genes, it is also not at all necessary that these behaviors be equally distributed within a given population. It is enough for the dynamics of populations to be able to do its work, that these behaviors are not too incompatible with each other within a population or in the various circumstances of the life of the same individual.

From there come these oscillations and these uncertainties so characteristic of human behavior (but

also of animal behaviors), these strange and undecided balances between what we call "good" and what we call "evil" and this permanent impression where we are of not being perfect, an impression on which religions and philosophies have played so much.

But in reality we are much more than perfect. For all perfection is only relative, adequate only to one situation – or a few. Life in its real unfolding, life as it actually plays out and risks itself on geological scales requires much more. It requires the adequacy with all the situations including those very rare, of a nonexistent probability on the scale of an individual but which are however certain on the scale of a few hundreds of thousands or a few million years.

There is no such thing as Good, or Perfect, or Adequate, or as "survival of the fittest," nor for that matter any "fittest" per se. With regard to the scales of time and History brought into play in Evolution, all these notions relate to particular contexts and circumstances. What we have trouble judging because a hundred thousand years or a million years has no concrete human meaning.

We can certainly imagine what happened on such considerable time scales, because we have traces, clues that allow us to follow as dotted lines what could have happened. But imagining the future on such time scales, for which we no longer have any of these precious clues that help us to reconstruct the Past, is completely beyond the reach of human capacities for daydreaming. And this is where "natural selection" guided by the judgment of men is generally either comical, or absurd, or grotesque, or dangerous, or disastrous, and most often all of the above.

A living morality is fully aware that men are apes, monsters of imitation and mimicry, and that as such they have a sickly need for reciprocity and equality and therefore also for just the opposite. But living morality does not forget that life endures essentially through its diversity and that, consequently, tolerance is not simply a matter of humanity, nor a matter of reciprocity, but an absolute requirement as to the very existence of living things in the duration.

Economics, which seeks to make everything similar,

would like to pass itself off as the science of rational choices. This claim may not be totally unfounded provided one adds in rather large letters "in the short term". Which would dress up the economy according to what we said above – but no more – with satanic air which suits it so well, in the sense that, precisely, the economy whose sight is very low, does not expect much and generally anticipates quite poorly.

What could a science of rational choices be in the biological medium or long term, that is to say a hundred thousand or 1 million years, look like? Would that still resemble in any way what we call economics, or even what we call ecology? It is very doubtful. What then could look like a living morality at the height of what we have now learned from Life? What would a human calculation of sustainability look like? Certainly not in any case to the simplistic morals of the religions that we know.

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