



# The Will in Cases of Moral Deviance: Towards the Re-Evaluation of a Forgotten Concept ?

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**Monica Heintz**

**The will in cases of moral deviance: towards the re-evaluation of a forgotten concept?**

Will is not a subject in anthropology. At least it has not been highlighted as such until a recent attempt from American phenomenologically-influenced anthropology reminded us of the widespread popular use of the concept, contrary to its lack of articulation within the discipline (Murphy and Throop, 2011). If we were to look back into the history of anthropology, the Culture and Personality American research trend of the 30s came closer to the concept when approaching psychological collective characteristics such as temperament as Margaret Mead did (Mead, 1963). But the existence of will could be also seen as an unspoken assumption behind Practice Theory with its emphasis on notions such as « agency » and « intentionality ». During the past decades close subjects have emerged: the anthropological research on morality, on emotions, on the body, which should be able to help consider the notion of will outside its initial psychological dimension.

This is not to say that “will” has been absent from social research. Individual will has rather been the unquestioned axiom behind the two main methodological approaches in social sciences. The very foundation of social sciences has been shaken from the beginning by the fight between social determinist approaches that see culture as a “barrier to volition” and methodological individualism that see culture as a “sculptor of volition”. While the first approach assumes that the individual will is absent, the second assumes that the freedom of choice (and will) is the basis of our social life. In this last perspective, will is often amalgamated with free choice<sup>b</sup> see the *homo economicus*, rational (utilitarian) choice models. And when it is acknowledged that the will is constraint by culture (habitus) and morality, by emotions and other mental and physiological limits, it is on the model of bounded rationality<sup>1</sup> that it is described.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of bounded rationality has been thoroughly analysed and enriched since Herbert Simon first defined it in the process of modelling decision making (1957). When making decisions (that should be the fruit

What I try to ask in this chapter is whether there is an interest today in the light of recent developments in the anthropology of moralities, of the body, and of emotions to place the concept of will on the map of social sciences concepts and go behind the usual assumption that analyses in terms of bounded rationality are sufficient to cover the social reality behind the concept. For doing so, I will first show how recent developments in the anthropology of moralities could inform the concept. Then I will apply a methodological individualist approach to a case study (of “mild” social deviance) from my fieldwork in Romania and show its implicit emphasis on the will as well as the limits of its efficiency in accounting for the reality observed. Finally I will revisit the same case study through an interactionist approach and show the complexity and the need for re-designing the concept of will to suit social reality within this perspective.

### **The anthropology of moralities and “the will”**

#### *Terminology*

The dictionary definition points at “will” as **a desire**, a wish, a longing, or a liking, an inclination, a disposition to do something. “Will” also receives a dynamic definition as an action of willing or choosing to do something, the movement or **attitude of the mind, which is directed with conscious intention to some action**, physical or mental. Facing it, morality is- according to the same Oxford Dictionary- a set of principles and judgements based on cultural concepts and beliefs by which humans determine **whether given actions are right or wrong**. Norms are “implemented” values, rules that are socially enforced and sanctioned within society.

But these are definitions coming from a dictionary of English and anthropologists often work in societies where terms such as “morality” do not even exist (for instance Humphrey, 1997). Faced to the difficulty to reach a universal definition of morality, researchers opt for cross-cultural working definitions. In my research on morality (Heintz, 2009) I have come to the working definition of morality as “those principles that trigger an emotional acceptance/rejection by the community”. The form of rejection- from disapproval through warning to exclusion- is not directly proportional to the moral offense, as other factors than morality dictate the management of a

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of his will) man ‘s rationality is limited by the information available, by the time available to make the decision, and by the capacities of his mind.

community. The reason for this **working definition** is very pragmatic and there is no claim that it would come close to a **universal definition** of morality. Rejection is noisy, triggers debate, is visible and therefore could be observed, analysed, compared. The corollary is that most of the case studies I came to analyse are cases of deviance, where moral rules or social norms are violated.

In order to overcome biases encountered in the study of moralities, researchers have gone beyond portraying moralities as a set of values existing in a given society to which individuals comply or not (Lambek, 2010). They have seen that they often have to bypass language because of the translation bias and look at actions as well as statements of morality (for instance in Heintz, 2006); that emotions are good indicators of hot moral issues (Haidt, 2001); that rejection and deviance put us better on the track of understanding what is morality rather than normality (for instance in Robbins, 2004); and that the freedom to express one's own morality in action is not easily quantifiable (Laidlaw, 2002). It is due to the strength of these very recent developments that we may try to reconsider the concept of will.

### *Where will and morality meet on the ground*

One of the first questions one could ask is whether behind a wrong action there was a will to do something wrong. Most studies in the anthropology of moralities assume that there was not; they rather assume that every human being wishes to go beyond her/his own particularity towards an ever-unattainable ideal. Virtue ethics occupy an important place in current studies in the anthropology of moralities. This could be the *a priori* assumption of the anthropologist or may be due to the *a posteriori* justifications of actors who deny their intentionality and invoke social determinism, arbitrariness, or misunderstandings in order to excuse themselves of wrongdoings in front of the community. But one knows that if deontology is important in our Western society (see the results of cognitive tests described by Nichols and Knobe, 2007), it is always accompanied by consequentialism. For instance what matters in front of the law is what you have done, not just what you have intended to do; even if what you have intended to do (or not to do) could offer you attenuating circumstances.

A second theme could be found in moral education, where the emphasis on the strength of will (the formation of will) is encountered in many Western societies: you

should have more will to overcome certain obstacles, pursue your (or others') goals. But this is by no means a universal characteristics and Rydstrom's ethnography of girls' education in Vietnam (2003) shows quite clearly how girls are educated not to assert their will, but to mould and make it disappear in the family landscape.

Finally another potential intersection between the will and moral values is to be found around the notion of shared intentionality considered as a basis for collective action. Shared intentionality could replace the importance of group identity as an engine for action (in collaboration for instance). What would be the difference between shared intentionality (a fortunate aggregation of individual will) and collective will (a conscious aggregation of individual will)?

As anthropologists, when we wish to do justice to the complexity of reality, we often end up by abandoning theory in favour of pure ethnographical accounts whose theoretical underlying frames are mixed, un-assumed or inexistent. What I intend to do in this article is to uncover the theoretical premises beneath the analysis of my first ethnographic material collected in a Romanian NGO, during my 1999-2000 fieldwork. After considering the methods at our disposal for investigating values, I show how my predilection evolved from methodological individualism to interactionism on the grounds of the capacity of the latest to account for my field data. By doing so, I also hope to throw light on the inadequate assumption of "will" – in its reductionist understanding as "freedom of choice" – that underlies methodological individualism.

## **The methodological individualist approach captures the expression of the will**

### *The choice of methods*

James Laidlaw (2002) challenges the simple deterministic Durkheimian relation between society and individuals, in which society dictates the best possible norms and the individual respects them by belief. Nietzsche reminds us that morality is unnatural to the human being, as it frustrates basic desires: hunger, thirst, and sexual appetite (Nietzsche, 1897). Human action is the result of a compromise between egoistic tendencies and the need for cooperation in society. The individual is often exposed to a dilemma about following societal norms or surrendering to his own desires, so his

action depends on his reasoning as much as on the freedom he enjoys for reasoning and acting according to it (Laidlaw, 2002). Individuals are not blindly following societal norms: they choose, negotiate, resist or comply with them, according to their reasons as well as their desires. Individuals with different social positions and from different societies have their own ways of defining their personal values, working through societal constraints, and translating in their own way beliefs and personal values in action. The harmonisation of values between individuals takes place by the confrontation with the others' solutions to moral dilemmas and evolves towards a collective elaboration of values and norms.

This model of action presupposes a neat distinction between the individual and the group. But if moral values are spontaneously and collectively created in a situated context by members of a community, we could hardly differentiate between individual and collective values. The individual can be assumed to act according to his own interpretation of available moral values only if the values of the groups are somehow distant from him, have been elaborated prior to his arrival and/or integration within the group (as is the case for migrants). If these values were constantly elaborated 'with him' and 'for him', his relation to values could hardly be described in terms of negotiation, resistance or acceptance. This also means that his will is not obliged to surrender or be opposed to the collective will if he has participated towards reaching the collective will.

Though I have used a methodological individualist approach in my earlier research (Rasanayagam & Heintz, 2005), I have found much inspiration in the method of moral dilemma elicitation that Thomas Widlok was applying to anthropological fieldwork (2009). The method of moral dilemmas elicitation consists in proposing several scenarios of moral (and morally neutral) dilemmas and collecting visual and audio materials that document the ways in which individuals deal with a potential dilemma. Elaborated by researchers from the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, the method allows to get around the universalist/relativist debate (a Western moral dilemma might or might not belong to the moral realm of a non-Western society) by opening the way to the thick description of the moral elicitation, thus overcoming the translation bias detailed earlier (Widlok, 2009). This method overcomes a second bias in the study of morality, which is that of limiting the field of the moral to explicit moral statements and moral justifications, the so-called "encoded morality". This method allows us also to witness an elaboration of

collective values, the very production and sharing of community norms, given the power relations in a community, the modalities of dialogue, the forms of verbalised reasoning and the response to this reasoning by the audience. The method I have used in the field is akin to the method of moral dilemma elicitation, except for its systematic character: I was not eliciting responses and just chased the debates provoked by moral dilemmas that arose 'naturally', as in the case of the French debate around the Afghan widow's execution. The disadvantage of my method is that the resulting data are not comparable cross culturally - we do not have the same set of dilemmas exposed to members of different communities as in the MPI Psycholinguistics project and as a result, the anthropologist's observations depend on the 'chance' that observable contested actions occur in the field. The advantage is the spontaneity of debates observed, which would crystallise or not around a moral wrongdoing according to the group's interest (and not the anthropologist's). Also, the frequency of occurrences, the language used, the timing of action and of debates surrounding it, are factors influencing moral values that could and should be taken into account.

The analysis of moral debates would remain afar from the real actions of an individual if not complemented by the ethnographic observation of contextualised real behaviour. As such the debate observed corresponds to a set of provoked and punctual instances of moral reasoning, shaped by individuals' life experiences, the moral frames existing in the community and the challenge posed by the particular context of enunciation. But the analysis of moral values underpinning observed behaviour is more difficult, as the anthropologist could not easily determine (nor can the actor accurately express it) what are the moral frames within which the actor is evaluating a situation and acting according to this evaluation. This issue is more pronounced at places and times of conflict that occur between several moral frames or due to change in moral frames (particularly because the change is frequently, but not exclusively, the result of a confrontation between several existing moral frames). I have encountered this conjecture on my ethnographic sites in Eastern Europe, where several moral frameworks have been in place to nourish moral reasoning and action. Field sites such as Eastern Europe that undergo rapid social transformation offer more visibility into the moral phenomena, the saliency of the 'moral' being enhanced by the conflicting nature of the encounter between several frameworks (e.g., the old and the new). I also chose to focus on deviant rather than standard behaviour: lying, envying, laziness and other

failures to comply with social norms, as they are triggering debates. Through analysis of perception of deviance by the community, its tolerance or stigmatisation by the community, I come to define the way in which moral values are created and reinforced in field cases.

### *A case study*

I will compare the efficiency of the two methods: methodological individualism that captures the expression of individual will and interactionism, which apparently does not, by looking at employers' commitment to work values in a Romanian nongovernmental organisation (NGO). I have conducted intensive fieldwork in the 2000s in this NGO in a period of economic distress and exacerbated individualism. I do not choose this example by chance. Back in 2005 I had used this case study to show how individuals negotiate (through moral deliberation) their allegiance to different "moral models" in a time of change and the construction of moral justifications of deviance of practice that are shaped by these models (Rasanayagam & Heintz, 2005). I was then still paying tribute to my upbringing in methodological individualism and thus Dumont's (1983) hierarchy of moral values seemed the clearest model to consider. Subsequent field data has led me to look at things differently and adopt a more dynamic view of moral values, which leads me in the last part of the chapter to reconsider the same case study of the employers' work values in the Romanian NGO within an interactionist framework.

The moral models upon which Romanian urbanites draw, are diverse and sometimes enter in conflict with each other. What characterises the post-1989 period in Romania is the rapid change in economic and political structures, as well as in individual and collective values. In the sphere of work, for instance, the new values that accompany liberal policies enjoy legitimacy because of their association with European moral values. The employees are thus faced with competing sets of values: the socialist morality with its emphasis on equality and the satisfaction of individual needs and the liberal values of competition, efficiency and meritocracy that characterize Western Europe societies. The new set of liberal values is rhetorically asserted to be superior, because of its link to economically successful societies. The old set of socialist values is closer to actual practices however, and thus can be more easily invoked in order to



explain them (having set up a 'tradition' of justifications and explanations conforming to these values). To further complicate the landscape of moral frameworks, the Christian morality, in its Eastern Christian (Orthodox) version, has no concrete discourse related to the sphere of work, and thus shadows individual action, within both 'old' and 'new' frameworks. The weight and influence of these moral models on individual action is thoroughly negotiated, the novelty of the encounter of frameworks meaning that no synthesis or even equilibrium between these models has been reached.

If the context of social change means that several moral models are simultaneously at work in society, the presence of a socialist past and the appeal for an 'European' present are responsible for the strength with which people believe in the power of these models. Indeed, one of the main disappointments with the socialist system was the duplicity and tension between the socialist values and the actual practices (reflected in the work of social scientists as the classic distinction between 'socialism' and 'actually existing socialism' (Bahro, 1978)). After 1989, the year in which socialism collapsed in Eastern Europe and was rejected by people, it was hoped that the new social order would not be duplicitous.

Therefore there was a strong discourse inciting people to actually believe in the new values and to 'really' behave morally according to them, because the very act of rejecting socialism meant for people that new democratic values had to be adopted; and certainly because this was a precondition for 'becoming European'. This led to a high moral exigency, which was publicly praised as one of the newly acquired freedoms. The post-1989 governments, mass media and intellectuals put pressure on ordinary citizens for becoming 'new men' and 'getting rid of the old habits', if they wanted to 'get into Europe' (i.e., join the EU).

Apart from the strong and conflicting moral models that characterise Romanian value system today, practices also enter into play and shape moral values. The moral justifications given by individuals, in which they explicitly or implicitly relate to moral models in order to justify their actions, show that deviant actions are more mildly judged if they are recurrent or if the presence of conflicting moral models prevents the elaboration of concrete guidelines. As a result of the negotiation between values and practices, the high standard of moral values is diminished and reshaped to accommodate practices that would have been otherwise considered as 'deviant' or 'immoral'.

This was clearly the case for Tudor, a young employee in his mid-20s working in the humanitarian NGO, who spent his time justifying his lack of involvement in the organisation in front of his colleagues who appeared to be more dedicated to the workplace. Obviously he wanted to do his job well. He expressed his belief that working in a humanitarian organisation requires indeed self-sacrifice: extra hours of work and a certain 'calling'. But he justified taking the job of public relations coordinator with this particular organisation because he needed money and needed to live in Bucharest, Romania's national capital, in order to prepare his entry exams at the Academy of Theatre and Film and become a film director, a profession for which he had a 'calling'. So he also strongly wished to prepare his exams well. While following his working hours, Tudor let his mind wander into the realm of Shakespeare and made numerous mistakes when writing his more down-to-earth correspondence with partner institutions, thus affecting the NGO's activity and reputation. Tudor was aware that none of the moral models that he invoked in order to justify his absentmindedness would absolve him from fault. Nonetheless he pointed out to his colleagues that he was working steadily, eight hours per day, under difficult conditions (it was 40 degrees Celsius in the summer with no air conditioning in the office), which would be satisfactory in a socialist work ethic model where sweating is equated to hard work. He invoked also the fact that his whole life was dedicated to work, because after his eight hours in the NGO he continued working until late at night for his entry exams- a behaviour that would satisfy the requirements of even the most extreme variants of the protestant work ethic. Finally, he pointed out that he was deeply compassionate towards the beneficiaries of the NGO activities (incurable children), a fact that was visible in his interaction with them and their parents. So he also wanted to be perceived as a hardworking person and a moral person by his colleagues. None of Tudor's justifications were lies and he probably embraced all the values he invoked, but none of these justifications actually excused him for not doing his job properly. His opposed but honest desires simply could not be fulfilled simultaneously given the limits of his time, mind and knowledge. He probably knew that this was an unsolvable situation, but kept on expressing guilt about it. Why?

Tudor was guilty according to all the moral models he referred to because his actions did not match his stated values. His justifications were constructed for the purpose of appearing less deviant in front of his colleagues. As an excuse strategy, he also invoked the poor performance and work involvement of the state employees from

the institutions with which he had contacts, the even more important mistakes they were making in their relation with him, their lack of immediate response to letters and so on. These statements together with arguments linked to the lack of clear norms provided by the NGO management, were meant to diminish the relevance of his deviant behaviour, by adjusting the work value system within which his actions had to fit. He was negotiating, both with his own consciousness and his colleagues, the necessary level of involvement in a humanitarian organisation, and he was doing this by proposing lower standards of action.

This behaviour was current among many service sector employees in Bucharest, who were aware of the fact that their performance did not match their values and the others' values, but 'could not help it'. Despite attempts to bring values closer to practices, most employees still remained 'in between', knowing what 'ought' to be done and doing what they could do, in the challenging social conditions generated by rapid societal change.

The model of explanation I use here superposes the macro-level of (multiple) moral frames and the individual reasoning and negotiation with them. This negotiation is the result of an internal drive (for peace with himself, in his search for being a better man) and of an external pressure (from his peers, in his search to show he is aspiring to be a better man). Had I relied on interviews with Tudor instead of working in the same office with him and observing him day after day, I would have certainly generated a single model of explaining moral values in action based on Tudor's own justifications. But *post factum* justifications (and even the very fact of wording inherent to a linguistic justification requires this) are the result of the rationalisation and advantageous reinterpretation of one's motives and action. They are often quite divorced from the reality in action.

Of course one could wonder whether we place the moral standard within a deontological or a consequentialist frame. If only intention to do good matters even when one fails to do it (deontology), Tudor could be considered to have acted morally (or at least this is how he justified himself). If we consider that what matters is the result (consequentialism), Tudor's failures to comply with the job expectations weight heavily. Moreover, his failure could have serious consequences: sometimes erasing the name of a beneficiary by mistake could cost a life. To translate this failure by the standards of

consequentialism in terms of “will”, we could say that Tudor’s will to do good would not have sufficed to make him appear as a good employee and even worse, as a good person.

### **But interactionism captures the complexity of social reality**

#### *Interactionism*

In the following account of the same NGO reality, I will abandon the two clear methodological stances that are holism and methodological individualism, in favour of what could appear as a hybrid methodological attempt to directly address the dialogue between individual reasoning, peer/group pressure and certain ideas of the good. In between the holist and the individualist approaches, for the past half-century anthropologists have been exposed to interactionism, which proposes intermediary tools of analysis of reality through social interactions. Interactionism does not assume the existence of a group and shows how collective action is created through interactions between individuals who have their own subjectivities. Despite the popularity of interactionism among anthropologists, in the anthropology of morality this perspective has not fully penetrated. Many anthropologists preferred to assume that groups/communities exist- at least this is what we can deduce from ethnographies in which the facts observed seem to derive from collective beliefs and actions that determine them. And other anthropologists resorted to pure methodological individualist approaches, which allowed them to focus only on interviewing instead of micro-sociological observation in the process of data gathering.

Apart from the complexity of the interactionist approach, there are other factors that prevented it from gaining (theoretical) ground in anthropology. If anthropology did not fully embrace interactionism, it is also because of its emphasis on the creation of rules and norms through interactions, a position of radical constructivism, which is opposed to the (undisclosable) essentialism that stands behind researchers’ continuous interest for survival anthropology, indigenous cultures, ethnos- to cite only the most obvious. If we consider the labelling theory developed by Howard Becker (1985[1963]) who asserts that deviance results from a process of exclusion due to the labelling of acts that do not conform to the rules of the society at a given moment (even more radically, to what the subgroup of moral entrepreneurs decide to promote as rules), we would

understand anthropologists' fear of falling into the realm of arbitrariness. Tradition and conformity loom large in holistic anthropological approaches such as functionalism and structuralism on which modern anthropology as a discipline was built. Interactionism questions the essence or the substance of culture and privileges the dynamics of the encounter social actors. However this approach leaves space for the affirmation of cultural trends through the cultural baggage that actors bring with them in the interaction and therefore could not be discarded on these grounds.

The focus on the micro level that allows interactionism to capture the interplay of facts, texts and subjectivities also seem to limit its coverage in time; interactionism suffers of chronic *presentism*. As an anthropologist, I need to add time and the historical perspective to the interactionist approach in order to transform it into a useful tool for analysis. Taking the passage of time (and social changes) into account translates at the level of data collection and at the level of analysis in taking into account past experiences, whether individual or collective (history, cultural heritages) because past individual and collective experiences influence present action.

#### *The same case study revisited*

The NGO that I shall call Alpha was established with international funding ten years before my arrival in the field. It was one of those NGOs born immediately after the Romanian Revolution from a sudden enthusiastic drive of some Western personalities towards the sordid fate of young orphans in Romania.<sup>2</sup> As a result the NGO was principally managed from abroad, while the whole operational team was based in Bucharest with smaller branches in several provincial towns. Two years prior to my arrival, the initial donations having been exhausted, the NGO started to finance itself through responses to calls for projects. They also restricted their activity to a narrower task: being the only service providers for a category of incurable children. From a humanitarian NGO, it had become a medically specialised NGO working closely to hospitals and health administrations in an attempt to supplement their failure.

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<sup>2</sup> Unlike the other socialist states, abortion has been forbidden in Romania by a 1967 decree given by Ceausescu who wanted to increase the force of the nation by increasing its population. It was one of the first laws to be abolished at the end of 1989. The phenomenon of abortion has been widely studied (Gail and Kligman 2000, Anton 2014). One of the consequences of the 1967 law were the undesired children born and abandoned upon birth. Fairly mediatised, images of orphanages filled over capacity, with no resources and with minimal staff toured the world after the Romanian Revolution.

According to my NGO colleagues, in a state able to provide care and support to that category of children, the NGO should not have existed. And they initially saw their mission as being limited to organising the field: identify and register all beneficiaries, diagnose them and put them on medical, psychological and social support, in order to be handled subsequently by hospitals and health administrations. On their side, hospitals leaned completely on the NGO, which was the only one able to apply for and obtain funding for the expensive medicine required by beneficiaries. Some of these children (6000 beneficiaries in the whole country) were affected by serious disease, were under medical supervision and required high costs for medication. However, the care of the many others who required much smaller expenses was also problematic due to lack of funds. The difference of means between NGO and the public sector was also apparent on the side of the employees. The NGO employees had wages 2-3 times higher than the average salary in the public sector and had better working conditions. While working for this NGO, I had the occasion to travel to its provincial branches and visit the NGO area in hospitals or clinics. The endowment, peace and quietness of the NGO area contrasted severely to the conditions in the rest of the hospital. Obviously this did not get unnoticed by the public sector staff.

Compared to public institutions, NGOs had some preferential status that gave them only a relative advantage. In fact, what appeared as an oasis of peace and perfection seen from the outside was an organization that had experienced an important turnover of employees. During the six months I have spent in the NGO, I witnessed a dispersal of managerial forces between no less than four managers. The NGO had four managers, but the general manager was usually abroad, an executive manager was on maternity leave (that lasts about two years in Romania), her adjunct left during my stay there, and the NGO was actually managed by a temporary manager until the executive manager came back from maternity leave. The temporary manager who was most present at the time of my fieldwork was extremely open minded, which, coupled with the “NGO spirit”, led to loose internal rules and to an almost total lack of control of employees’ work. Or, as the NGO changed its activities and mode of financing, jobs evolved, especially at the headquarters where ten employees worked. The accountant and the financial administrator had clearly defined jobs, but the project managers and the driver had to reinvent themselves continuously, each finding its tasks and niche within the organization. The temporary manager trusted that everybody knew his job -

which was unlikely given that “jobs” were created as the NGO developed and given that employees continuously changed them. He trusted at least that everybody was motivated to do his job<sup>3</sup>. The employees were overqualified, too young and too ambitious to aim at creating a ‘community’ or a collective identity by themselves. The management did not give them the means or even the goal to identify with the organisation.

The turnover is the first symptom of this NGO’s failure<sup>4</sup>: after one or two years in the organization, despite the relatively good work conditions and pay and the absence of real problems within (conflicts, work pressure etc.), employees left the organization. I should underline that this turnover was detrimental to the organization that needed a much greater stability in order to pursue its aims. One of its missions was to act as a source of information and a point of reference for its beneficiaries, who were supposed to remain in care for their lifetime. The continuity of employment on such jobs was also crucial for the relations with their numerous external partners. Indeed business relations were mostly built on personal grounds in the uncertain Romanian economic environment at the time. It had to be based on trust- or trust is gained over time.<sup>5</sup> Some of the employees knew from the start that their choice to work in the NGO was opportunistic- they took the job for the financial benefits it brought and not because of a real interest in humanitarian action, which was in total opposition to the NGO’s spirit at the beginning of the 1990s. Often the managers issued work contracts to employees although knowing they would not remain in the organization, and despite the large pool of candidates from which they drew. (I was personally recruited out of about hundred applicants and the managers knew from the start that I would be there only for six months). In sum: no strong management rules, no clear job descriptions upon recruitment and, mostly as a result, important turnover and no feeling of belonging to a community or building a collective identity. Most management theorists would predict an organisational failure for such institution. However, joint action was possible (even if not well coordinated), employees devoted more than 40 hours per week to their job and

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<sup>3</sup> The only unmotivated person who was finally fired during my stay was the driver. But this did not happen because he did not work enough, but because he stole repeatedly from the premises.

<sup>4</sup> Turnover is considered a sign of lack of satisfaction at work. According to Hirschman (1970) there are two possible reactions to dissatisfaction in organisations: exit or voice. Turnover is the only exit when voicing one’s disapproval is useless.

<sup>5</sup> I have addressed in detail the issue of the personal character of business relations in Romania at the turn of the 21st century in Heintz, 2006.

the NGO was functioning well, even if not to its maximum potential. Why? I would say that the place usually filled with clear organisational rules was taken by strong moral values.

First, a strong sense of humanitarian responsibility that was declaratively located at the level of individual will seemed to make joint action possible. During the informal interviews with my colleagues, all asserted their dedication to the beneficiaries (incurable children). The individual will to do something good was stronger than the rules of the enterprise. None of the employees spared her/his time in the NGO because each one of them had a sense of engagement towards these “helpless children”. All complained about the lack of strong management of human resources and lack of organisation, all underlined that loose management could have led them to act otherwise and all chose to speak about their personal devotion to the children and not to their job. But in all cases, work was done and employees collaborated with each other (despite the critical positions they had one against the other) because of this invisible link to the needed children. When asked, they would all choose to emphasize that their ethical position was individual, had grown from their personal education and the origins of their position could have been situated at the intersection between several ethical frames available in society at the time. Obviously a juxtaposition of similar individual ethic codes does not make up a collective ethical code. But if things worked and joint action emerged- from underneath, from the employees (management was too loose to dictate action and contented itself to give a goal), it is because employees shared the same overall values: pity and responsibility towards helpless children. Here shared ethics was not linked to the pre-existence of the group, nor did it foster group-ness. It was the result of shared intentionality or a shared goal of helping children.

Second, the silent presence of the NGO colleagues was crucial in developing this “individual” ethics. An individual might agree that contributing to children’s wellbeing over the world is a noble action, but this will not necessarily lead him to making donations to UNICEF spontaneously. However he might do it under the pressure of the other’s gaze, or, as Margaret Gilbert states, if a common goal creates obligations among those who are pursuing it (1996). Despite the lack of a community, my NGO colleagues were present and exercised a silent pressure on Tudor through their own dedication to work. They stayed extra hours at work, volunteered to acquire extra-competences in order to help the project advance, used their own family contacts to smooth



administrative paths. These tokens of individual will weighted heavily on the economy of group action. They became quickly the only legitimate way to act, outlawing everything that was just routine behaviour. Confronted to this pressure, each individual would react differently: either correct his behaviour by shame, fear of stigmatization as 'insensitive', 'selfish' etc. or by a need to give some sense to his actions by making them relevant and in harmony with the others' actions. Tudor, the 'deviant' employee (I recall that he was considered deviant only in the sense of being less implicated in his work because of his alternative vocation to become film director), felt often the need to justify his behaviour by fear of receiving negative judgments, despite the fact that in this loosely formed community the danger of exclusion was weak. On the contrary, one of those who were working hard, Carla, kept complaining about the lack of management of human resources and thus probably of recognition for her own involvement in the NGO.

Third, most employees had a past work experience that was more distasteful, with lower pay, harsher managers and a less noble mission to fulfil. This aspect came up in conversations and helped employees to put into perspective their criticisms towards the Alpha managers. Even when not clearly stated, employees' judgment of the present situation was a reflection of their past ethical experiences. Life facts, life events and personal trajectories influence the way in which individuals support, reject or transform values.

Thus if we return to our first reading of Tudor's case that emphasised only his conflicting volition, we may finally understand why his position was without issue. Tudor was never confronted to a manager whom he could oppose and who could punish him for not doing his job. He never had the opportunity to have his will measured against the authoritarian will (or even the collective will of his colleagues). Rather he evolved in an environment where his job rested on his own will and consciousness to do his best for the vulnerable children; but an environment where he felt the silent pressure of his colleagues who seemed to do their best for these children. This is what made his situation painful and forced him into restlessness. There was no neat opposition between his will and the others', but an internal contradiction that evolved in an environment where models of good practice were not spelled out but present, where the past job experiences had been potentially worst, where the humanitarian spectre was omnipresent. All these features, individual and collective, past and present,

concurred to make him express his unsolvable guiltiness through continuous justifications.

What interactionism allows is staging the moment of negotiation and all the factors influencing the continuous re-creation of values through action. Such an approach allows to overcome the fixity and reductionism contained in terms such as « socialist moral framework » or « religious moral values », thus overcome a certain form of social determinism. It reframes the question of individual will and shows that whatever the individual will that precedes action, individual will needs to be constantly asserted and renegotiated when meeting the other individual wills as well as the emerging shared will of the collective.

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