Trust and ethics: ambivalent foundations of relationship and sui generis forms of gift

Simone D'Alessandro[♦][♣]

Abstract[1]

Is there a circular relationship between trust and ethics? Is it possible to alter their relationship, changing the perception that social actors have of them? How has trust changed in the transition from modernity to post-modernity and how does it change in times of crisis? Starting from the epistemological assumption that progress in the social sciences is determined by the change in the theoretical horizon produced by "a reformulation of metaphysical assumptions"[2] and combining this path with the relational perspective, according to which "not the facts, but the relationship between the facts is what requires analysis"[3], we will examine definitions, meanings, functions and relationships between trust and ethics. Following the theoretical logical method, we will understand that trust and ethical behaviour are particular forms of gift[4] that co-own each other.

♦ University of Chieti-Pescara. Italy. simone.dalessandro@carsa.it.

♣ Social Research Director of Hubruzzo Industry Responsible Foundation (Hubruzzo.net) and Adjunct Professor of Sociology and Creative Processes in Organization (Unich.it).

2 See J. Alexander's strong program in Segre, 2019; 12. It is not enough to observe reality, it is necessary to interpret it, taking into account theories and traditions whose foundations have a metaphysical character.

3 Ferrarotti, F. (2018). *La sociologia come analisi critica della società.* in Cipriani, R. (a cura di). *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia.* Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, p. 24.

4 The classical meaning in M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, 1ª ed. 1925, revisited by G. Satta, 2011.

As such, they are ambivalent in nature and their circle can also produce dysfunctional outcomes that depend on the ability of social systems to modify collective perceptions through forms of communication, in the awareness that distrust constitutes an ineliminable and, paradoxically, preparatory element for the restoration of the trust circle. The relational circle between gift, trust, collective ethics and personal morality does not end with distrust, but changes in a contingent way, determining perverse effects: correct behavior could produce, unintentionally, a disaster; incorrect actions could generate unforeseen positive effects. The perverse effects cannot be defined as exceptional - as is believed in the theory of rational choice - but recurrent because daily practices are marked by an intuitive, emotional and moralistic trust circle that prevails over logical reasoning, as ascertained by both relational theory and behavioral economics. Functionalist paradigms cannot engineer and optimize the performance of trust.

Keywords: Relational theory, trust, ethics, gift, perception, perverse effect, System 1, System 2.

1.   Sociality and trust: circular but ambiguous relationship

Trust is at the Centre of our daily life and our life in common and it is impossible to erase it, otherwise we risk erasing social action (Fanciullacci, 2012, 280). Trust belongs structurally to human relationships, but it enjoys a fragile harmony. It is an eventual, contingent phenomenon; it is created and destroyed frequently, in different contexts and circumstances.

It is not univocally perceived, nor unanimously shared.

However, its weakness on the level of social practices can prove to be a strength on the evolutionary level. If, in fact, it is true that trust brings the person closer to the other, it is equally true that mistrust sets limits, preventing human behaviour from taking for granted that the reliability of a given subject, in a given circumstance, recurs in subsequent interactions with the same subject. It follows that trust is a factor that must always be reconstructed or, at least, renegotiated when entering into a relationship, in order to avoid a return to distrust. The construction of trust relies on relationships that are repeated over time and evolve into recurring links. Therefore, it requires a long time and consistency in the way it is placed.

Trust can also be broken through the falsification of the last relational exchange: a single element of incoherence, compared to previous exchanges, could undermine its foundations.

As a result, distrust takes root quickly and spreads like a virus: its meme is contagious, fast and pervasive. Certainly, it is possible to restore trust where it has been lost, but this implies a strong motivational leverage and an ability to scale down what has happened before. It is possible to restore trust, because the human being needs to believe that each of us should have new opportunities, because at any moment what the subject has suffered could make another suffer.

For this reason, the circle of trust is not completely suppressed, otherwise the minimum conditions for the survival of a social system would not be created[5].

However, an organization where the circulation of trust is often interrupted and restored is fundamentally blocked: it welcomes new things very carefully, except to stop at the first obstacle, to return to the previous belief system or to give confidence to other groups.

The transition from a modern era to a post-modern society, characterized by precarious and fragile relationships, has increased interruptions and misalignments between personal and systemic trust, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

In the collective imagination, the concept of trust takes on multiple denotations and connotations: it means trusting, but also hoping that the other does not disappoint our expectations, or trusting in the experience and/or abilities of others. Each of us interprets the term according to our level of education, values and past experience, as such it is a multi-dimensional concept and, as such, requires several indicators to be examined[6].

Since its foundation, sociology has directed its most important research towards the analysis of trust.

Simmel, one of the pioneers of the discipline, maintained that when we ask for and obtain trust, we only mediate between what we know and what we ignore[7].

Moellering, continuing the Simmelian perspective, defines trust as a weak form of inductive knowledge that leads to a suspension of judgement[8].

Giving trust means reducing the complexity of decision-making processes, decreasing the cognitive load that would arise if we were to research the

---

5 On the systemic circle of trust see Luhmann, N. (1979). *Trust and Power*. Chichester West Sussex: John Wiley&Sons Ltd.
6 On the multidimensionality of trust: Bianchi, L.; Liani, S. (2017). Fidarsi della fiducia? Uno studio sull'intensione del concetto. *Quaderni di Sociologia*, V. LXI, n. 74**,** p. 127.
7 Simmel, G. (1988). *Sociologia*. Milano: Edizioni di Comunità. p. 299.
8 Moellering, G. (2001). The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension. *Sociology*, 35, 2, pp. 414-415.

credibility of any person (or organization) with whom we establish relationships.

Giving trust means saving time, money and energy that can be used in other contexts or for other opportunities.

However, if on the one hand trust speeds up the processes of socialization and decision making, on the other it exposes us to the risk of not having made the right choice.

Trust has also evolved over the ages. In traditional societies, giving personal trust was a more habitual behavior than giving trust to an organization; on the contrary, in modern societies, the occasions have multiplied in which an individual must suddenly trust formal institutions and organizations.

Contemporary society is subject to greater risks related to trust[9], because globalization on the one hand has considerably weakened emotional and kinship ties - through these ties it is easier to ascertain or test people's reliability - on the other hand it has forced each social actor to make quick choices with other unfamiliar subjects, coming from worlds and cultures dissonant with their own.

Consequently, in the contemporary world, relying on trust has become a compelling and more necessary necessity than before modernity and pre-modernity: a recurring and fast practice.

Following the definitions of sociological and economic thought, trust can be strategic or moralistic: in the first case we trust a person, making a decision based on the information we have available and our attitude to risk (although many schools of thought they consider this concept of trust spurious, because it is substantially guided by rationality, awareness and interest, as we will see in the following paragraphs).

In the second case we decide to trust the other even in the absence of information, following a value or moral imperative (We could define it deontological and universalistic. We will return to this theme in the third paragraph) which leads us to consider people worthy of trust, in the belief (intuitive, but not statistical[10]) that most of them share our values.

Strategic trust reflects our expectations about how people will behave, based on the data available to us, while moralistic trust is determined by our beliefs about how people should behave. Strategic trust implies a greater cognitive load:

---

9 Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.

10 On this dichotomy see: Kahneman, D. (2012). *Pensieri lenti e veloci.* Milano: Mondadori, p. 25-28. The author calls System 1 the fast thinking and System 2 the slow thinking. Both are present in our cognitive process. The former is intuitive, operates quickly and automatically, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. The second directs attention to challenging mental activities that require focus, such as complex calculations. Giving confidence unconditionally and without having taken information is typical of system 1: trust is generally intuitive because man prefers to orient himself towards choices that imply a cognitive saving of attention and concentration.

only after we have worked on the information, we decide to give confidence. Moralistic trust is a shortcut in the decision-making process and comes into play more frequently, as the human being always opts for load-reducing choices. Strategic trust is preparatory to rational, purpose-oriented action; moral trust is guided by value-oriented action.

Following the theory of rational choice, it may be difficult to establish whether a subject has granted trust simply on the basis of strategic or moralistic criteria[11]; but if we observe from a relational perspective and take into account recent evidence of behavioural economics and social neuroscience, we can deduce that the trust process is mainly intuitive-emotional-moralistic, because every day the person selects information about the other that is neither exhaustive nor decisive for the final decision: in most cases credulity - as well as distrust - relies on personal intuition. In this case, the person falls into errors of assessment due to the well-known 'halo effect'.

As Kahneman demonstrates, in his psychological experiments on decision-making processes under conditions of uncertainty, the human being relies on his intuition - defined by the author System 1 - when he decides to believe unconditionally and quickly, based on his convictions. Subsequently, he is able to make his thought coherent *a posteriori*, in order to justify the final choice.

On the contrary, the human being is diffident or slow in granting trust, when he concentrates on the criteria to be adopted - in this case we refer to System 2 which is rational and statistically oriented[12].

When we are confident or suspicious with reason, the risk of making mistakes is minimized, without prejudice to the unpredictability and uncertainty about the choice we have made a priori and which we will only verify after the other (to whom we have given confidence) does not betray our expectations.

But when we decide to trust on the basis of intuition, we are guided by what we have already experienced in previous experiences, looking for familiarity, associations and consonances with current experience.

---

11 The theory of rational choice aims to explain the action, individual or collective, as the result of the orientation of individual actors towards the efficient achievement of an objective. Those who follow this perspective consider intentions as the only cause of behaviour actually and deliberately followed by the actors. But this perspective is reductionist in that it excludes most behaviours and sudden changes, determined by impulses, self-deception or lack of clarity in determining objectives. The theory of rational choice is insufficient, because it reduces choices to the paradigm of methodological individualism (applied by influential sociologists such as Elster, Boudon, Coleman, Hedstroem) and analyses perverse effects as phenomena determined unintentionally because of the misalignment of individual rational intentions, excluding the perverse effects produced by other voluntary or involuntary phenomena of an irrational nature that make the failure of the set objectives much more frequent than one would think.
12 On this topic Kahneman 2012, 109.

If a person we met for the first time reminds us of negative experiences in the past, the trust pact is broken. This way of proceeding is not rational, but intuitive. When we have no references from the past, we tend to fall into the trap of the halo effect. The tendency to appreciate or detest everything about a person, including things that have not been observed, is called the halo effect[13].

If trust is granted in a strategic way, based on data-driven reasoning to establish reliability, we can say that our expectations are guided by knowledge of the context. But if trust is granted intuitively, it means that we need to believe and look for the person who is most like us, avoiding selective attention to signs of inconsistency with what we are really looking for. We want to rely on and decide to do so, rationalizing *a posteriori* the decision we would have taken anyway, finding useful arguments for such self-deception.

This is why trust proper is intuitive or moralistic (we will describe the concept better in the next paragraphs). From a sociological point of view, collective trust should generally be intuitive, because all processes concerning recurrent collective behaviour cannot be taken slowly or on the basis of accurate research of information, otherwise we would complicate our daily habits.

The social behaviour of each of us happens with recurring daily automatisms, without adequate reflection, in the hope that expectations will not be disregarded.

Unconditional trust allows us not to withdraw money from the bank even when a serious economic crisis breaks out; or to entrust our children to teachers every day, trusting that their behaviour will continue to be reliable.

During the Covid-19 emergency, trust allowed the populations of many nations to stay at home, strictly following the indications of the institutions (institutions which, in other circumstances, are criticized).

Those who execute without discussing the rules assume that those who have established them know what they are doing.

We therefore trust the skills of others, even though we do not know the curricula of those who order us to follow the rules.

This trust agreement is also quickly determined by anxiety and risk communication. If there were not this unconditional and quickly agreed trust, no crisis could be managed by any system[14].

---

13 On Halo Effect: Kahneman 2012, 110.

14 The first Italian study conducted on trust at the time of Covid19 was carried out in collaboration between the "Trust, Theory and Technology group" and "Evaluation Research group" of the Institute of Science and Technology of Cognition of the National Research Council (CNR). The study was aimed at Italian citizens who had reached the age of majority. In particular, 4,260 people were interviewed between 9 March (beginning of the survey) and 14 March 2020 (end of the survey). The study basically confirmed that the population has confidence in the measures adopted by the government and trusts that those who make decisions know what they are doing. See: Falcone, Castelfranchi, Colì, *Corona Virus and Trust*,

It follows that trust is a necessary relational asset in any age, even more so in times characterized by greater complexity and speed of decision-making processes. Trust is a proactive attitude that transfers one's hopes to someone or something. In particular, the trust we place in collective processes is guided by our perceptions, the halo effect, intuition, values, emotions and is an integral part of social capital.

According to the pioneers of sociology, it is one of the basic pre-contractual elements for the construction of social cohesion[15]. According to the research conducted by the author of this paper, trust should be defined as a particular form of gift without which the triggering of solidarity practices is not possible.

Sociologists, according to paradigmatic affiliations, have classified trust with different terms which, however, confirm the foundations of the discourse established so far. Giddens, for example, distinguishes personal trust from that of abstract or symbolic systems.

Personal trust usually develops between individuals who know each other, because they have built a relationship that repeats itself over time (Giddens, 1990, 88), but the fact that it is repeated over time, creating more familiarity, does not represent a rational criterion for continuing to trust.

On the contrary, trust in abstract systems does not presuppose any prolonged interaction over time, but grows through relationships with those responsible for these systems, both human and technological: in this case there is no indisputable reason to continue to trust in successive times.

For Giddens, therefore, granting and obtaining trust in relationships means reducing complexity and maintaining a balance between knowledge and ignorance, allowing us to act where there is not full knowledge of the problem we have. To the words of Giddens are the statements of Niklas Luhmann, systemic sociologist, who shows that in the absence of trust an individual could not even get out of bed in the morning, because he would be assaulted by an indeterminate fear and a paralyzing panic[16]. Trust is an attitude that allows us to make decisions that involve risks. So, paradoxically, there is a systemic logic in the 'crazy decision to intuitively rely on the other'.

Luhmann identifies two types of trust: personal and systemic. According to the scholar, in post-modernity the use of personal trust has decreased, while systemic trust has grown.

For the author, in order to develop trust, some conditions are necessary: a) familiarity with an alter; b) acting based on motivations recognizable by the

---

2020.www.cnr.it/sites/default/files/public/media/rassegna_stampa/cnr%20istc_nota_coronavir us%20e%20fiducia_una%20ricerca%20esplorativa-2.pdf
15 On the relationship between personal trust and organic solidarity: Durkheim, E. (1971). *La divisione del lavoro sociale*. Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.
16 Luhmann, N. (1979). *Trust and Power*. West Sussex: John Wiley&Sons Ltd, p. 5.

actors; c) the guarantee that the participants in the relationship will meet continuously (at least until the reasons that led them to act are exhausted); d) the ability to blame someone, if trust is misplaced (an assumption of responsibility by those who want to gain trust); e) knowledge of social structures shared with others (actors must be able to obtain information on the morality, culture and norms of the system in which they are trusted).

The social scientists examined so far - between sociologists and psychologists - agree in the construction of the following dialectics: 1. personal trust versus systemic trust; 2. strategic trust versus moralistic-intuitive trust. If we would like to try a further classification of the concept on the basis of logical, instrumental, value or emotional expectations we may have another ranking proposed by the author of this research paper:

- Gnoseological trust, based on previous knowledge of the person to be trusted.
- Value trust, based on our personal way of thinking that guides us in our choice.
- Emotional trust, based on the presumed empathy that the one who gives trust feels towards the one who benefits from it.
- Normative trust, based on the fact that there is a rule (implicit or explicit) that obliges the person who has been invested with trust not to betray the expectations of the person who has granted it, on pain of a sanction (the rule of gift in pre-modern societies, for example).

All the classifications examined are characterised by dichotomous logics that lead to the same conclusions: in everyday social processes a trust granted on moralistic-intuitive-affective categories is more likely.

No theoretical paradigm examined denies the relational evidence of trust. Trust is a reducer of complexity.

Trust is a generator and feeder of bonds and can trigger virtuous circles with the components of the vital worlds: ethical dimension, economic sphere, normative system, cultural beliefs, values, politics.

Trust is ambivalent in nature, because in granting it, it forces the other person not to betray the trust granted. It is an obligation whose strength lies in its weak and tacit way of placing itself and, in this, it possesses characteristics homologous to the gift, as we shall try to show in the following paragraph.

2. Trust, a particular form of gift. Triggering not necessarily virtuous practices

The trust that a community can show in an organization has emerging properties that vary with the subjects and components involved. Moreover,

changes in the state of trust are all the more sudden the more the community is subjected to repeated communicative exchanges that jeopardize the overall coherence of the relationship. As the degree of complexity of the interactions increases, it becomes easy to fall into contradiction, even without wanting to.

This is why a society dominated by media exchange increases the phenomenon of oscillation from trust to distrust. The social solidarity that triggers the act of trust can be based on equality as well as difference. Durkheim distinguished between mechanical solidarity (practiced by homogeneous social segments or as a result of the acceptance by individuals of the constraints imposed by the community; this is typical of pre-modern societies) and organic solidarity[17] (this is typical of modern societies based on the division of labour and the differentiation of specialized functions and implies the conscious and free cooperation of social agents), recognizing the latter as a moral character. In postmodern societies, elements are added that Durkheim could not foresee and that modify the classification of the French sociologist (questionable even in the period in which he wrote): communication becomes a dominant and automatic system and relations become weak, highly subject to flexibility and contingency.

The postmodern subject grants trust "without trusting trust", accepting it quickly and forcibly, not being able to do otherwise.

His acts of solidarity can originate from the awareness of interdependence, but also in an anomic or, on the contrary, normalized and ritualized way.

For this reason, according to my thesis, it is not substantially possible to distinguish between forms of mechanical solidarity and forms of organic solidarity.

It is trust that generates acts of solidarity, when a social actor offers his faith to the one who must maintain it. This is a gift. He who has been considered worthy of trust has been made responsible.

If he or she is a person, he or she is aware that he or she can lose the relationship by behaving unreliably; if he or she represents an institution, he or she will keep in mind that he or she can consolidate or break the trust that the person has. This process represents a constraint even if it is weak (as it is neither normalized nor declared punishable).

It follows that trust shares the same logic as gift. Well known and important for the history of anthropology, the theory of gift, as expressed by Marcel

---

17 The difference between organic solidarity and mechanical solidarity is analysed in Durkheim, E. (1971). *La divisione del lavoro sociale* Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.

Mauss[18]. The theory of gift is born from the comparison of various ethnographic researches, among which the study of the ritual potlach[19]and the kula[20].

The exchange of the goods of ancient societies was one of the most common and universal ways to create human relations. The gift was, according to Mauss, a total social fact. The expression total social fact is intended to denote that in many facts of associated life the elements belonging to all spheres and at all levels of social reality are involved simultaneously and indissolubly: juridical, economic, political, religious, recreational, artistic, psychological[21].

Godbout defines gift: any provision of goods or services made, without guarantee of return, in order to create, support or recreate the social bond between people[22].

In pre-modernity, the mechanism of gift was articulated in three fundamental moments based on the principle of reciprocity: a) giving; b) receiving (the object must be accepted in order not to offend the donor); c) reciprocating (this too is an obligation linked to prestige, the concept of indebtedness and the shared social practice of gratitude/recognition).

In archaic societies there was a ritualized obligation to return. The value of the gift lay in the absence of guarantees for the donor. An absence that presupposed a great trust in others (this is the link of reciprocity between trust and gift), but the lack of restitution placed the one who had not paid back, in a condition of inferiority: he became 'ungrateful' and could lose credibility, prestige, political weight or the opportunity to be able to count again on other gifts. The pervasiveness of the gift, as an element capable of marking out the relational processes of the ancients, can be understood by examining how densely it was present in linguistic terms: in ancient Greece there were five different words that could be translated with the word gift: *dós, dôron, doreá,*

---

18 Mauss, M. (2002). *Saggio sul dono. Forma e motivo dello scambio nelle società arcaiche*. Torino: Einaudi. (*Essai sur le don,* 1ª ed. 1925).

19. The potlatch is a ceremony that takes place between Native American tribes on the Pacific Northwest coast of the United States and Canada. It takes the form of a ritual ceremony that includes a feast of seal meat or salmon, in which destructive practices of goods considered to be of prestige are flaunted. During the ceremony, hierarchical relations between the various groups are established or strengthened through the exchange of gifts. The Potlatch is defined by the anthropologist Franz Boas as an example of gift economy, in which the hosts show their wealth and importance through the distribution of their possessions, encouraging the participants to reciprocate.

20 The kula is a symbolic exchange of gifts made in the Trobriand Islands (in the Pacific Ocean) between the populations of these islands. The kula was first described by anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski in Argonauts of the Western Pacific, a work published in 1922.

21 On the total social fact: Gallino, L. (1993). *Dizionario di sociologia*. Torino: UTET, p. 300.

22 Godbout, J.T. (1993). Lo *spirito del dono*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri., p. 30.

dósis, dotíne; in the Latin language there were three terms: *donum, munus* e *beneficium*[23].

In the Greco-Roman world, the gift is an act characterized by a very strong collective value, an authentic social glue, a guarantee of community cohesion and, for this reason, connoted by a specific rituality. Trust is the most precious relational gift, so much so that in the Greek world, in this regard, the concept of πίστις was theorized: it includes within it the concepts of trust, belief and fidelity.

I trust in you, I believe in you, I have faith in you: they look like free acts. But in giving to the other person, each of us expects the other to respect a covenant, not to betray the bond that has been triggered.

Trust is a gift that obliges, in a lateral way, reciprocity.

Conversely, the gift is a form of trust, because in the act of offering, the one who offers trusts that the recipient, at the minimum of expectations, will like the gift and, at the maximum of expectations, will reciprocate in similar forms.

What changes in the transition from pre-modernity to modernity? Contrary to the dürkhemian vision, according to the research examined by the author of this essay, the forms of ritualistic gift remain unchanged: in the rules of courtesy, in the codes of affective relations, in economic reciprocity, in political exchanges oriented to the management of consensus, exactly as in the past, with different but still ritualized formulas.

Forms of gift that articulate both correct and deviant behaviour: from philanthropic foundations to clientelary forms; from voluntary organizations to clandestine networks that support fugitives; from charity auctions to the control of essential goods and services by drug traffickers; from social policies to Camorra subsidies to poor families or the families of their armed arms.

In every group, formal or informal, normal or deviant, legal or criminal, there are forms of solidarity that take the form of tangible and intangible gifts.

The act of trust is, in itself, moralistic and corporate, positive for the beneficiary community, but not for the whole community of a social system. What changes with the advent of post-modernity?

If modernity was conditioned by the value of production and an ethical guidance of the intellectual, in post-modernity the value of consumption prevails and the intellectual is replaced by the communicator-influencer.

The gift remains pervasive even in today's complex social systems, but it is not properly mechanical, nor properly organic, only extemporaneously expressed (in particular, in moments of strong systemic crises) and can be more

---

23 On the distinction of terms see: Luzzi, R. (2014). *Il dono degli antichi*. In Olivieri, U.M.; Luzzi, R. *Comunità e reciprocità. Il dono nel mondo antico e nelle società tradizionali*. Pomigliano d'Arco: Diogene.

easily violated by single anomic or narcissistic behaviours and more quickly manipulated by forms of communication.

Yet there are very strong similarities between postmodernity and primitive behaviour, as demonstrated by the anthropologist J. McIver Weatherford in his Tribes on the Hill[24].

Through ethnographic analysis and participatory observation of the behaviour of politicians working within the American Capitol Hill, the official seat of the United States Congress, the American anthropologist demonstrates that the practices, ceremonies, gift rituals and forms of consensus management of political groups are virtually identical to the behaviour of ancient tribes.

What changes compared to the past is, perhaps, the reflexivity on gift, because it can be more easily questioned. It follows that the gift takes on a more stringent moral connotation than in the past: gift and trust become riskier to offer, but preserve, as in the past, the silent co-obligation pacts. Philosophers and mathematicians have developed theories and games of cooperation in order to clarify how co-obligatory trust is.

Plato and Aristotle already address this issue, but it is with the correspondence between Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat that a first theory of cooperative and non-cooperative games is sketched. In the 18th century Rousseau proposes an example that will regenerate and recontextualize in the following centuries. This is the dilemma of deer hunting.

With this dilemma it is shown that in many situations to cooperate means to have more, from all points of view[25].

Rousseau on a purely deductive level had understood what mathematicians John Von Neumann, Oskar Morgensten and Nobel Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash Jr. formalized mathematically in the 20th century, with game theory and the prisoner's dilemma.

The dilemma of cooperating / not cooperating has represented a problem and an opportunity in all ages. A circuit that generates ambivalence and paradoxes because:

- gift and trust create bonds, capable of determining forms of collaboration, exchange and economic reciprocity;
- they can, however, be instruments of blackmail and moral co-obligation;
- they can represent mere ritualistic expedients aimed at convincing even the most suspicious to behave in solidarity.

---

24 Weatherford, J. M. (1985). *Tribes on the Hill*. Westport (CT): Bergin & Garvey.
25 The example can be found in: Festa, R. (2007). Teoria dei giochi ed evoluzione delle norme morali. *Ethics & Politics*, IX, pp. 148-181.

The paradox of gift constitutes its strength: if it is true that, on the one hand, giving without demanding a counter-gift represents the very condition of giving; on the other hand, not reciprocating means losing the relationship. Moreover, in the etymology of the word gift there are two opposite meanings. In the Indo-European language 'to do' means both 'give' and 'take'.

Similarly, also the word gift, of Germanic origin, in English translates as 'gift', while in German the word gift means 'poison'; and in French the term obligé indicates the condition of debt generated by the gift[26].

Among the semantic folds of the gift are gratuitousness and obligation, spontaneity and constraint, generosity and debt, interest and disinterest, recognition and servitude, exchange and conflict[27].

This versatility allows the gift to serve as a meta-relationship as the foundation of social bond, legal relationship, economic exchange, political pact, moral obligation and religious behaviour.

Trust also presents similar paradoxical elements: granting a strong trust means to load with strong responsibility the one who, if he does not want to lose a bond, must keep the pact.

Gift and trust generate tension, both for those who offer and for those who receive. If gift and trust establish the positive conditions for the continuation of a relationship, they generate a beneficial circuit; but it becomes impossible to establish whether they originate from a selfless impulse towards the other or from individual interests. As the scholar Pavanello wisely states: "We know what a gift is, but we cannot define it"[28]. There are also philosophers who deny the existence of the gift.

According to Derrida, for example, the gift is impossible for thought because it is not intentional. Following the deconstructionist approach - based on questioning every aspect of the term and every theory of the concept - the French thinker states that the giver is not aware of the intrinsic value of what he does. His ability to donate is not sufficient to demonstrate awareness of the importance of the gesture he makes. That is why it is as if he has not done what he has done; in other words, what he does is something, but it is not classifiable as a gift[29].

---

26 On the semantic ambiguity of the terms gift and trust see: Iannuzzi, I. (2017). La fiducia e il dono. Due risorse relazionali nel panorama sociale contemporaneo. In *Storiadelmondo* n. 85, p. 4; Satta, G. (2011). *L'ambiguità del dono. Note su dono, violenza e potere nell'Essai di Mauss.* Rasini, V. *Aggressività. Un'indagine polifonica*, Milano: Mimesis, p. 97.

27 On the dialectical oppositions of the gift see: Marci, T. (2012). *Il circolo della gratuità. Il paradosso del dono e la reciprocità sociale.* Trento: Tangram.

28 Pavanello, M. (2008). *Dono e merce: riflessione su due categorie sovradeterminate*. In Aria, M.; Dei F. *Culture del dono*. Roma: Meltemi, pp. 49-50.

29 Derrida, J. (1996). *Donare il tempo. La moneta falsa*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
.

Simone D'Alessandro

However, according to my theoretical and empirical research[30], this observation does not confirm the inexistence of the gift, but rather its sui generis and collective foundation: an emerging and generative product of bonds that goes beyond the will and awareness of the individual.

Following a relational perspective (avoiding both the reductionism of methodological individualism that conceives gift as a form of interest and the reductionism of methodological collectivism that classifies gift as an act of solidarity) we can affirm that gift and trust possess logics and values that go beyond the logics and values of each social actor: gift and trust are founding elements of the relationship that, in turn, founds itself thanks to them, in an inextricable circuit that produces relational goods[31], but can also lead to relational ills.

Gift and trust cannot be reduced to free instruments of altruism, nor to mechanisms of mere exchange. They are phenomena that occur when people enter into a relationship and during the course of the relationship evolve, leading to unexpected or predictable behaviour. In both cases:

- They consolidate or weaken a bond.
- They generate expectations that can be met or disregarded.
- They produce obligations of various kinds that can be fulfilled or evaded.

Gift and trust express their strength in 'standing between'. Trust is a gift, but to give is to trust. Gift and trust are not simply concepts, nor tools, nor symbolic rituals: they are relationships that fluidify and mark all other relationships. Therefore, they are second-order relationships or meta-relationships.

The 'trust' meta-relationship is not triggered without the gift meta-relationship and vice versa. Without this epistemological premise, any analysis of trust and gift is reductionism. This chapter shows that trust and gift, from whatever ontological or social perspective they are grasped (even the negationist one), are at the basis of a relationship and can also produce non-cooperative behaviour by triggering unethical attitudes, a theme we will address in the next paragraph.

---

30 D'Alessandro, S. (2019). The reflective relationships between society and technology. In *Scienza e Filosofia*, n. 21; D'Alessandro, S. (2019). *La maggioranza silenziosa e la fine del sociale. Riflessioni su Baudrillard.* In *Scienza e Filosofia*, n. 21; D'Alessandro, S. (2014). *L'identità della differenza. Ripensare la relazione nei sistemi sociali*. Milano: Franco Angeli; D'Alessandro, S. (2012). Sociology and the 21st Century: Breaking the Deadlock and Going Beyond the Post-modern Meta-reflection Through the Relational Paradigm. In *World Future: The Journal of Global Education*, 68:4-5, 258-272.

31 According to Pierpaolo Donati's definition (Donati, 1993) a relational good is a good that can only be produced and enjoyed together; by those who are, precisely, the producers and users themselves, through the relationships that connect the subjects involved: the good is, therefore, called relational because it is (lies in) the relationship.

3. Ambiguous and paradoxical relationships between trust, ethics and morals

Since words define the intentions of those who act through the interpreted meanings, it is necessary to start from the etymological origins of the word Ethics, reconstructing meaning and context relationships. Ethics derives from the Greek ethos which means custom, habit.

But it also means home, being inside, belonging. The terms of kinship such as brother-in-law or sister-in-law also derive from the ancient Indo-European root 'své'.

By means of ethics, a solid relationship is semantically built between men, designating a belonging and consolidating bonds and cohesion. It too exists 'among' the members of a group that decides to share a value orientation. Ethics is: a relationship.

This distinguishes it and at the same time brings it closer to the moral term which means costume, from the Latin mos-moris. Ethics concerns the relationship with others, the public and intersubjective dimension, while morality concerns the relationship of the person with himself and with others and his own awareness of good and evil, of right and wrong.

However, there is no personal morality that is not influenced by public ethics.

Before being an institution, a set of regulations[32] or an object of reflection by various humanistic disciplines - philosophy above all - ethics is determined through social practices in which it is negotiated what is right to do together or individually for the common good. From relationships come decisions that become habits and stabilize beliefs that generate different cultures.

Cultures, in turn, are systematized *a posteriori* by social actors (scholars, intellectuals, institutional representatives) in theoretical forms that guide practices. Socrates' ethical theory, for example, held that good is achieved by seeking wisdom.

This is possible through arête - virtue or disposition of mind - which generates solidarity ties. Aristotle will resume the observations of Socrates, to found the first systematic moral theory on virtues. For Aristotle, 'good' is 'what all things tend to'[33].

---

32 Ethics can be viewed as: institutional, normative and social: a) institutional because it performs a collective function; b) normative because it pushes individuals to act and have positive or negative feelings according to its norms; c) social, because it places limits on the desire of every single individual.

33 Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, Libro I, 1094a; on the historical evolution of ancient morality, see: A. Adkins, *La morale dei greci da Omero ad Aristotele*, Ed. Laterza, Bari 1987.

Simone D'Alessandro

Any moral theory examines the delicate relationship between trust, law and the calculation of utility. Articulating a speech on what is right or wrong depends on the understanding and inclusion of the aforementioned elements.

We have seen in the previous paragraphs that intuitive trust is also defined as 'moral', because it is guided by value, emotional and experiential references expressed by the person who grants trust.

Therefore, giving trust is a moral and culturally negotiable act. It follows that deciding to share a moral behavior is, in turn, a free act towards a community, because there is a risk that some pretend to accept habits and behaviors that they then do not implement. It follows that ethical / moral behavior is also a fiduciary gift that further consolidates (or breaks down) social bonds.

There are three families of moral theories that have influenced Western cultures - and now also Eastern ones that have accepted the universal declaration of human rights - on the relationship between what is right and what is legal:

a) deontological theories (based on duty); b) consequentialist theories (based on the cost / benefit ratio); c) those based on virtues.

We will focus on the first two theoretical families that still influence the choices of most democratic nations.

Deontological theories emphasize that each of us has certain duties[34].

Christian ethics, for example, is deontological, based on universal defined commandments (or principles) that must be accepted a priori.

The commandments 'not to kill' or 'not to steal' are universal, permanent, indisputable and do not depend on the circumstances. Kantian ethics are also deontological (in fact Kant laicizes Christian morality).

The German philosopher with his moral theory still influences and guides a large part of the constitutional dictates and codes of professional ethics. For Kant an action is moral only if it is performed out of a sense of duty.

Kant called maxims the intentions that determine actions.

A maxim represents the universal principle that inspires the decision that drives action. Kant believed that as human beings, rational beings, we have certain categorical, absolute and unconditional duties.

He thought that there was a fundamental categorical imperative: act according to the maxims you want as universal laws. This principle is known as the maxim of universalization (very similar to the Christian maxim 'do to others what you would like to be done to you', but which we could vary in a secular way with the maxim 'treat other people as ends in themselves and never as means to an end'.

---

34 On the classification of moral theories see: N. Warburton, *Il primo libro di filosofia,* Einaudi, Torino, 2007, pp. 48-49.

Deontological ethical theories that refer to the notion of the universalization of moral judgements have been criticized because they are not useful when it comes to making decisions between two right choices that are mutually exclusive.

There are specific cases where a certain duty such as 'always tell the truth' can conflict with another duty such as 'do no harm to those you love by saying things you might avoid saying'. If we were to stick to Kantian duties, we would often end up deciding not to decide.

Daily human behaviour is subject to emotions, pleasures, threats, economic difficulties, emotional ties, sympathies that obscure the rational ability to choose between categorical and universal duties as philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger have shown in the last century, highlighting the link between action, emotional components and knowledge, denouncing the limits of a self-referential rationality[35].

Finally, deontological theories do not take into account the consequences of actions, since "well-intentioned idiots who unintentionally cause a large number of deaths due to their incompetence could be morally acceptable"[36].

To respond to the shortcomings of deontological theories, consequentialist theories intervene. If a deontological moralist judges that an act is always morally wrong, whatever benefits it may bring, a consequentialist, on the contrary, admits the appropriateness of an action based on the results it may produce. Among the consequentialist moral theories, the best known comes from Bentham's utilitarian approach. According to this approach, the action is to be considered right if, applying itself in a specific circumstance, it succeeds in producing more happiness or the best balance between happiness and unhappiness: the cost/benefit analysis is a consequentialist approach.

Obviously, the consequentialist approach has to do with probable, but not certain consequences. Moreover, in such an approach it is not what is right universally and a priori that matters, but what produces the most benefits, reasoning on a case-by-case basis. Obviously, this theory facilitates the operational plan of those who want to decide on specific problems.

However, this path also opens up considerable problems.

First of all, problems are created between individual benefits and collective benefits. When is it appropriate to choose in favour of one or the other?

Secondly, problems arise with the definition of the concept of benefit - not to mention the even more complex and nuanced concept of happiness - whose meaning changes according to the cultural approaches, collective beliefs and values of each individual whose morals do not coincide with collective ethics.

---

35 F. Crespi, *La sociologia come conoscenza e l'ambivalenza dell'agire sociale* in R. Cipriani (a cura di), *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia,* Maggioli, Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna, 2018, p. 50.
36 N. Warburton, 2007, p. 57.

Here we will examine some specific examples, dwelling on the different choices in the way to deal with the Corona Virus, in particular on the Swedish model considered, in the collective imagination, the 'divergent' system par excellence.

When the epidemic broke out in the West, European nations took different paths conditioned by their own values and cultural references: countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece, then France, Denmark, Norway and Finland decided to make the so-called lockdown (some of these countries in a very strict way, others in a soft way) - consisting in closing most of the economic activities and isolating the most infected areas by inviting the population to stay at home - opting for a moral deontological universalist approach - evidently influenced by the constitutional dictates, derived from the Christian and Kantian cultural heritage - consisting in the attempt to take care of everyone, regardless of age and previous health conditions, following the universal maxim: every life is unique and deserves to be saved.

At first the United Kingdom, Holland, Switzerland, Portugal and Sweden opted for a cost/benefit analysis, following the utilitarian tradition, looking for the maximum possible happiness for the community. The United Kingdom, through its Prime Minister, spoke explicitly of herd immunity, based on the following logic: in infectious diseases that are transmitted from individual to individual, the chain of infection can be interrupted when a large number of members of the population are immune or not susceptible to the disease.

The higher the percentage of individuals who are resistant, the less likely an individual is to be infected. If the pathogen does not find receptive individuals, it circulates less, thus reducing the overall risk in the group.

Herd immunity is a form of indirect protection from infectious disease that occurs when a sufficient percentage of a population has become immune to an infection[37].

The choice of herd immunity involves a laissez faire to the pervasiveness of the virus and implies a considerable number of deaths and the contamination of at least 60% of the population before the goal of total immunization is achieved: a choice that trades the functioning of the economic system for the health of citizens (Weber would have considered this choice as consistent with the Protestant and Calvinist ethics underlying the capitalist spirit).

This first decision of the British government - a decision that was abruptly abandoned - followed a variant of utilitarianism: negative utilitarianism.

According to this approach, in all circumstances the best action is not the one that produces the best overall balance between happiness and unhappiness for the greatest number of people, but the one that produces the least total amount

---

37 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herd_immunity

of unhappiness: it was assumed that stopping all economic activities by keeping people at home would produce more deaths than the epidemic.

Sweden proposed a divergent model and never went back on its choices, trusting in the virtuous behaviour of its citizens, giving indications on how to avoid risky behaviour without stopping social and economic activities, starting from the assumption that we have to live with the virus for a long time.

Here too we have the herd immunity, but the government does not openly declare it. This does not mean that the Swedish government has not taken measures to contain the contagion: it has closed schools and universities (which have continued to operate with e-learning); it has banned the gathering of people; it has recommended social distancing and minimum distances in supermarkets and other indoor places.

Economic and recreational activities remained open; at the same time, citizens were asked to be responsible, in order to avoid any opportunity for contagion.

Sweden has been able to afford to act against the trend compared to most European countries also for a series of social and territorial elements: a) almost 50 percent of the Swedish population is single-family; b) public opinion is more willing to accept a different risk / benefit ratio in strategic choices; c) Swedes have a vision of independence and a relationship with loneliness that facilitates them when social distance becomes the norm; d) Sweden has a low population density; e) the Swedes have been able to build a balanced relationship between city and countryside, between personal spaces and work spaces, between medium-sized cities and villages; f) the Swedish state has built a highly trusting relationship with its citizens which it considers responsible regardless of the requirements imposed; g) the institutional communication strategy has tried to reassure the population in times of crisis to avoid hysteria and psychosis, counteracting media alarmism; h) the scientific decision support pool of the Swedish state assumes that there is no evidence that forcing everyone to stay at home can make a difference; much better to introduce strict measures at specific intervals without blocking the economic system; i) while other nations need to use fear and norms as deterrents, to force the community to behave respectfully, the Swedish government gains confidence even in situations of normality and for this reason it also faces crises in an ordinary way; a strategy that has also worked for other issues such as, for example, vaccination.

In Sweden there is no law requiring parents to vaccinate their children against known epidemic diseases, yet the vaccination coverage rate reaches almost 99% of the overall coverage; l) It is in the Swedish tradition to be a pioneer of divergent choices.

The Swedish cultural approach is based on trust and a sense of individual responsibility. The government adopts a variant of negative utilitarianism,

defined as 'utilitarianism of the rule' which attempts to combine the best aspects of utilitarianism with the best aspects of deontological ethics.

General rules are adopted which tend to produce greater benefits for all or for the greatest number of people, leaving them free to choose.

The Swedish government believes that its citizens can respond better to recommendations than obligations. We could define it as a 'nudge' that has already given some fruits, as many companies have independently decided to reorganize themselves with smart working. But there are also historical reasons that led to the evolution of this approach.

The historian Peter Baldwin, in the book Contagion and the State in Europe 1830-1930, reconstructs the impact of the eighteenth-nineteenth-century debate between the "contagionists-quarantine" and their opponents, in the strategies of containment of devastating epidemics-pandemics such as cholera, smallpox and syphilis.

With the cholera epidemic of 1830, Sweden has a radical tendency towards quarantine. With the Spanish fever (1918-1920) Sweden changed strategy. Benefited from war neutrality, it overcomes the pandemic with fewer deaths than other nations: a third of the infected country (for a population of 5.8 million), 34,500 deaths and a lethality of 1.8% with peaks of 3% in the most hit. This past experience has inspired the current government and its consultants in the strategy of combating Covid-19.

South Korea - considered by international public opinion the virtuous model of sweet lockdown par excellence - has also adopted a compromising model between universalistic maxims and cost / benefit analysis, following the path of organized and intelligent remote control: a) on the one hand, it made the execution of a large number of swabs widespread; b) on the other hand, it applied contact tracing, or the possibility of reconstructing the chain of contacts starting from a diagnosed case and then proceeding to isolation and quarantine.

This nation has developed an extremely sophisticated system for intercepting positives and their contacts, based on the activities and movements of people with the infection.

At the beginning of the epidemic, to keep track of cases, those arriving from China had to provide their mobile number and fill out an app daily, reporting their health status.

Finally, China has pursued a form of forced egalitarianism of behavior, imposing a total restriction of the freedoms of the individual components of its population. This was possible, because this nation has an authoritarian system. In this case he opted for Hume's moral theory: when it is difficult to agree on the choices, the Leviathan intervenes and decides for everyone.

The aforementioned specific examples that arise from different ethical approaches show us:

- That it is difficult to determine and enforce universal rights and duties that are not consonant with socially shared values.
- That the outcomes produced by historically inherited cultures and beliefs can produce paradoxes, rejections and perverse effects as in the example of the United Kingdom.
- That the dilemma to cooperate / not to cooperate remains at the foundation of all formal and informal relationships of human sociality; even in the Covid emergency we did not experiment with a globally shared strategy. This did not happen even in other situations (2008 economic crisis, Sars, Earthquake, signing of the Kyoto Protocol, interventions for peace or war in the Middle East, etc.). If we reduce the behavior of each nation to the behavior of an individual, we may come to the conclusion that individual morals have blocked a shared ethical process.

Both the theoretical recognition of ethical approaches and the specific examples show how the moral approach can change according to the historical evolution of countries; many countries have done nothing but comply with current morals, applying what the population would have accepted.

Governments that did not understand their community had to change their strategy. Regardless of the Chinese option, all the decisions adopted by democratic nations were able to be applied not only on the basis of prescriptions and sanctions, but above all thanks to the support of social actors belonging to the community.

In Italy, the government has managed to recall the fundamental values of its culture, together with the deterrent of fear, to convince the population to respect the rules.

In the United Kingdom, through the polls, the government understood that the path of herd immunity - among other things communicated in a cynically explicit way - would not be accepted; the government's ethical approach has clashed with common morality.

The Swedish government, minimizing the problem, did not have the need to use the deterrent of fear, but preferred to follow what has always been more suitable for its community: to face extraordinary phenomena in an ordinary way, relying on the principle of individual and collective responsibility.

These cases show that the behaviors determined by moral choices are not immediately stimulated by the rules of law, but by values, fear, emotions.

The transgression of a moral commandment appears analogous to the betrayal of trust, as well as violating the rule of reciprocation and gratitude for the gift received. Beyond the normative sanctions - which pertain to the prescriptive logic of the law - there is a social foundation linked to our categories of meaning, our emotions and the legitimacy established by the fiduciary agreement[38].

For this reason, before the norm there is an aligned or misaligned relationship between trust, ethics and gift that is established regardless of any possible instrumentalization or measurement of benefits.

Social action has an ambivalent relationship with norms. Its ambivalence is dictated by drives coming from System 1 (intuition-emotion-morality) and System 2 (rationality), as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, but with a clear prevalence of System 1.

There is a social logic that goes beyond the logic of each person and recreates, on a daily basis, the circle between trust, gift and ethics.

It is not possible to articulate an organization without trust. It is not possible to direct it towards plausible categories of meaning if a dialectic between right and wrong is not constructed (even when this dialectic is modified with respect to changing times). It is not possible to articulate such a dialectic if we do not trust the following statement: "doing right things creates more favourable conditions for survival, cohesion and development".

It is not possible to experience social cohesion if we do not start the circle, giving confidence in a choice considered right. But this choice considered right is not necessarily right for everyone or in every circumstance. Following the epistemological and logical thread started in the previous paragraphs and continued with the description of moral theories and specific examples described in this paragraph, we have the following relational links:

- Trust and ethics are particular forms of gift and constitutive foundations of the relationship.
- Trust and ethics are particular forms of gift that imply a co-obligation between those who grant trust (following an ethically shared maxim) and those who benefit from the trust granted (being able to respond equally correctly).
- Trust and ethics are ambivalent - like all forms of gift - because they oscillate between freedom and constraint in a lateral way and because they change their meta-relational forms according to the contexts.
- The violation of trust determines the violation of ethics and vice versa, implying the deactivation of the circle (with relative failure of the

---

38 This normativity constitutes an indispensable epistemological presupposition for the social sciences.

    relationship) or its displacement to other areas of action (regeneration in other smaller communities that replace and contrast ethics through personal morals).

- Trust and ethics are necessary conditions, but not sufficient to generate cooperative behaviour; they can also be used as a justification for incorrect, violent and destructive behaviour, in a logic of moralistic conflict between antagonistic positions.

We can compare the ambivalent nature of ethics with the law. Both ethics and law govern relationships between individuals, but they rely on different means. While the law is based on valid territorial law (the law is promulgated so that we are aware that if it is not respected it will be followed by a penalty), ethics is based on a moral law known to the community and shared informally.

Law establishes the rules of coexistence between individuals, ethics marks the daily practices of human conduct and goes beyond the norm, because it is capable of determining a choice even in the absence of a law.

The ethical choice has a weaker sanction, but a stronger influence than the law, in social practices. Ethics includes what the law excludes.

Ethics accepts the dialectic with what is not ethical, understanding the contradictions arising from those who are marginalized. Ethics does not mean 'order'; it does not mean rejection of the values of others.

Ethics goes beyond the functional concept, negotiating with what is other than itself, triggering an effect of reciprocity that is typical of the relationship.

Following the relational perspective, if we suspend the relationship with the other, we also suspend the relationship with the self[39]: in this sense, ethics provides additional elements for the construction of individual and collective identities. Ethics is value and function, but above all it is relationship.

It arises 'between' people and allows for the negotiation and inclusion (or exclusion) of values and behaviors. This is why ethics does not depend on the strength of law, but on the solidity of trust.

An ethical attitude depends on the degree of openness towards trust in people, institutions, economic forecasts, collective rules.

Eloi Laurent[40], taking up the thesis supported by Keynes in 1936, analytically describes its foundation in institutional and economic relations.

Laurent's studies show that in societies where trust prevails over a sense of mistrust, there is a reduction in the phenomenon of corruption.

---

39 On the emerging effects of the relationship, see: P. Donati, *Teoria relazionale della società: i concetti di base,* Franco Angeli, Milano, 2009.
40 E. Laurent, *Economia della fiducia,* Lit Edizioni, Roma, 2013.

Simone D'Alessandro

But this does not mean that societies where corruption, nepotism or tax fraud reigns have a high rate of distrust. Criminal organizations are communities in which interpersonal trust networks are high and replace trust in institutions.

Distrust in a subject, therefore, does not cause generalized distrust, but builds and regenerates trust elsewhere, with alternative subjects.

As writer Herman Melville wrote: mistrust is a phase of trust.

The circularity between trust, ethics and gift is inevitable. A circle that is not eliminated, but moved or transformed, narrowed or enlarged in its relations.

The fact that there is a circle does not mean that it always produces relational benefits or goods. It follows that the fundamental problem is not: how to restore the circle of trust? But it is: where and how to direct trust?

A clan trust could enter into open conflict with the institution or build a valid alliance with it. Laurent speaks of the 'crisis of trust' that characterizes complex social systems, distinguishing it from the crisis between trusting social actors. However, the author 'trusts' too much in strategic trust, compared to moral trust. For my experience as a researcher in the field - and in coherence also with my epistemological references - it is exactly the opposite.

Trust possesses an intrinsic morality that must be directed towards adequate and sustainable paths, avoiding relational evils that arise from misalignments between the official collective ethics of a nation state and the heterogeneity of moral approaches shared by groups belonging to that same civil society, which is fragmented every time it takes a position on specific issues (think of divorce, euthanasia, the concept of just war, the relationship between merit and social equity).

The misalignment between ethics and group morals causes tensions that can lead to the marginalization of the deviant group or a revision of the official rules (think of the victory of divorce in Italy where discordant opinions have emerged among Catholics on the inseparability of marriage, leading to a revision of behaviour and changing the way of judging those who decide to divorce).

If an inclusive review of marginal groups with dissonant morals is not carried out in the social system, it will increase the contrast between the groups and the tearing of the bond of solidarity. At that point, each group will follow its own path. In Italy, this fragmentation is evident: multiple morals blocking the birth of shared ethics.

If we want to avoid tensions and divisions between groups, producing a shared ethical sustainability, we must build "that cultural humus that generates the perception of legality as a substantial value and a precondition for development and well-being.[41]

---

41 On this topic See: C. T. Siciliano, *Come promuovere la cultura dell'etica e della legalità per uno sviluppo sostenibile delle comunità,* Labour&Law Issues, Vol. 1, n. 2, 2015, p. 46.

This is determined by a system's ability to communicate what the positive and negative effects of trust are and what the obvious links between ethics and trust are, by analysing specific examples and valuing good practices. In terms of prevention, the dissuasive effect is the direct consequence of greater transparency and participation that increase the level of awareness and intransigence through the culture of ethics and legality in daily action.

But without the daily and concrete perception of the example, it is difficult to make appropriate behaviour replicable.

Moreover, communicating on a daily basis the ability of law enforcement agencies to suppress negative phenomena does not contribute to the restoration of confidence, but rather fuels a perception of insecurity and a culture of resignation: perverse effects of social action.

As we will see in the next paragraph, in contemporary complex systems, univocal and positively oriented communication affects trust more than in the past, but determines minimal effects of change.

While a communication of the negative is immediately perceived in both attitudes and behaviours.

In complex systems, positive feedback should be greater than negative feedback. It follows that the media should have more responsibility than in the past. This should imply more contrast against those who produce fake news.

But contrast can not only be normative or punitive, but must be accompanied by cultural awareness and nudging.

4. Misalignment between ethics and trust in the perception of reality distorted by the infosphere

Before entering into the critical analysis of the process of perceptual distortion - determined by the interpersonal, mass-media and cross-media systems of communication - we list some paradigmatic examples from which the ambiguities and paradoxes of this phenomenon emerge:
- *First example*. Exaggerated perception of decline and insecurity in general, compared to the statistical data. Robert Duffy, director of the English section of the Ipsos research company, in a multi-year study - launched in 2014 and involving 38 countries - shows that Italy is the nation with the most distorted perception of reality. Italians are the people with the highest level of negative perception of almost all the phenomena that happen in the country: they assume that 49% of their compatriots of working age are unemployed, when in reality it is 12%; they believe that immigrants make up 30% of the population, when the

real figure is 5%; they believe that 35% of people in Italy have diabetes, when in reality it is only 5%. In the ranking drawn up by the English researcher, the United States is in second place and France in third place.[42]. An analysis that comprehensively clarifies the era in which we live, where the perception of reality is altered by a communicative system that feeds the rhetoric of decline and alarm[43].

- *Second example*. Exaggerated perception of levels of corruption, compared to reality. In the research carried out by the magistrate Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini, *La corruzione tra realtà e rappresentazione. Ovvero: come si può alterare la reputazione di un paese,* presented in January 2019[44], the author shows that in Italy the perceived levels of corruption are much higher than the real ones. We suffer from 'Botswana syndrome'. We think we are more corrupt and uncivilized than we are. Moreover, we also suffer from the well-known Trocadero Paradox: the more effectively we pursue corruptive phenomena in terms of prevention and crime in terms of repression, the greater the perception of the corruptive phenomenon[45]. Since 2012, the year in which the anti-corruption law (Legge Severino) was passed, Italy has climbed eighteen places in the Global Corruption Perception Index: from 72nd to 54th. This figure is included in Transparency International's ranking which measures the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the perceived corruption index[46]. The data is known by professionals, in particular the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. However, the media have addressed the issue a few times. Italy is the country with the highest perceived corruption (around 90%), but with more than 30% confidence in the government, which is higher than that of other countries with a lower perception of corruption: Greece, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia (between 80% and 90%). 85% of Italians are convinced that institutions and politicians are corrupt and yet, to the specific question asked to a sample of citizens, if they had experienced, directly or through a member of their family, a case of corruption in the last 12 months, the answer was negative in the majority of cases, in line with other developed nations.

---

42 B. Duffy, *I rischi della percezione. Perché ci sbagliamo su quasi tutto,* Einaudi, Torino, 2019.

43 https://perils.ipsos.com/archive/index.html

44 https://www.italiandiplomaticacademy.org/la-corruzione-tra-realta-e-rappresentazione-ovvero-come-si-puo-alterare-la-reputazione-di-un-paese/

45 http://www.dirittopenaleglobalizzazione.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Il-Paradosso-di-Trocadero.pdf

46 www.transparency.org.

- *Third example*. The increase in confidence in institutions during the Crown Virus pandemic due to fear and lack of alternatives. The first study conducted on trust at the time of Covid19 (carried out by the Trust, Theory and Technology group and Evaluation Research group of the National Research Council's Institute of Science and Technology of Cognition, addressed to a significant sample of Italian citizens: 4260 interviewed), confirms the high values of trust expressed in the various responses. The high level of trust, supported by arguments, is due to the strong activity of the authorities and the perception of an imminent danger: a typical dynamic of trust. In particular, in their conclusions the authors of the research state: "As argued by many trust theorists ([Luhmann, 1979], [Batson, 1991], [Hardin, 2002], [Gambetta, 1988]) and also shown in our model ([Falcone&Castelfranchi, 2001]; [Castelfranchi&Falcone, 2010]), a fundamental function (psycho-social, individual and collective) of trust is to face uncertainty: to reduce risk perception; trust gives subjective (before objective) security. Trust makes it possible to face risk and to assume it: trust is accepting to expose oneself to risk ([Mayer et al., 1995]) (...) In fact, trusting Public Authorities (the only ones who in this case are the engine, coordinator and active operator of the response to the threat) becomes (...) a goal of citizens (...) there are no possible alternatives to the interlocutors to whom we can entrust ourselves (who else can we delegate the task of saving ourselves?)"[47].
- *Fourth example*. Meritocracy blocks the social lift and consolidates the power of elite consortia that it should paradoxically fight. In 1958 the American sociologist Michael Young coined the neologism meritocracy, writing a dystopian pamphlet on the negative consequences of the ideology of merit. He argues that stratification, when it develops on the basis of principles of merit, is accepted by each social stratum and paradoxically consolidates social immobility[48]. However, the term meritocracy will be used in the opposite key to Young's thesis[49]. In 1981 Boudon talks about the perverse effects that are produced even when

---

47 R. Falcone, C. Castelfranchi, E. Colì, *Ricerca esplorativa su Corona Virus e Fiducia*, 2020. www.cnr.it/sites/default/files/public/media/rassegna_stampa/cnr%20istc_nota_coronavirus%20e%20fiducia_una%20ricerca%20esplorativa-2.pdf, pp. 20-21.
48 M. D. Young, *The rise of the Meritocracy,* Taylor and Francis, 1958, p. 99; il tema è ripreso in M. Boarelli, *Contro l'ideologia del merito,* Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2019.
49 This is a magnificent and ironic example of perverse meta-effect: perverse effect in perverse effect.

everything is done to avoid them[50]. In 2006 Marie Duru-Bellat demonstrates that the increasing improvement in general education has not led to a significant increase in social mobility[51]. The French sociologist does not identify a strong direct effect of the opening up of the French education system - enshrined in the reforms undertaken between the 1960s and 1980s - on social fluidity. According to the author, the distribution of school credentials has remained strongly uneven and has allowed the wealthier social strata to maintain their advantage. This has been done through different strategies: a) prolonging the course of study; b) addressing the most prestigious educational chains and the most accredited institutions (and/or sections). What would make the difference would no longer be the mere possession of an educational qualification, but the type and where it was obtained. The hierarchy in access to school credentials is evident in the grandes écoles, the higher education institutions for the training of the ruling class, which are characteristic of the French system. These institutions are accused of promoting the social reproduction of the elite. This process has increased distrust of the educational system in general. In 2019 the historian Mauro Boarelli confirms the same dynamic also in the Italian case: the rigid application of the meritocratic principle has generated even more marked social inequality[52]. The mass media have never brought on the agenda the scientific validity of this debate, favouring the consolidation of the perverse effect and the false belief that merit is linked to the capacity of the subject and not to his caste advantages.

- *Fifth example*. Perverse effects of Whatsapp and Telegram on trust, prophylaxis, sociality and unfair competition with the media. It is clear that the free messaging of smartphones has replaced or amplified - depending on the circumstances - many interpersonal and informal community dynamics that used to be practiced in public places, particularly gossip. At the same time, these universes have become the places where fake news quickly goes viral. Paradoxically, the increase

---

50 Boudon R., *Gli effetti perversi dell'azione sociale,* Feltrinelli, Milano, 1981. Although I agree with Boudon's basic thesis, I do not share the paradigm of the theory of rational choice supported by the French sociologist. According to my experience as a researcher, perverse effects are produced by unintentional processes, by an individual rational action that is not synchronized with the rationality of others, but also by individual and group irrationality. Therefore, the perverse effect is not an exceptional or infrequent phenomenon, but a daily phenomenon, even if not necessarily catastrophic.
51 M. Duru-Bellat, *L'inflation scolaire. Les désillusions de la méritocratie*, Seuil, Paris, 2006.
52 M. Boarelli, *Contro L'ideologia del merito,* Laterza, Bari-Roma. 2019.

in fake news about the pandemic has played a positive role - albeit unintentionally triggered - in the virtuous behaviour of citizens, keeping the tension high and fuelling fears and alarms even greater than the phenomenon. These instruments have also fuelled the self-referentiality of deniers. At the same time, the same instruments have changed the relationship between gift, trust and ethics with respect to the problem of newspapers sent free in whatsapp and telegram groups: this act, perceived by many as a gift, has completely covered the damage caused to newspapers (over 800,000 readers lost in Italy between 2018 and 2019). The misconduct is officially condemned by the official media (public ethics), but morally accepted by the telegram and whatsapp (group morality) groups. The gift consolidates the strategies of cognitive reinforcement (a posteriori coherence) of justification of the incorrect behaviour: the donor claims to do it for others. The beneficiaries accept it for convenience, but also in order not to hurt the donor's sensitivity. In other cases, misbehaviour is minimized because it is compared to much more serious misbehaviour or is perceived as compensation compared to other damage suffered in times of crisis. This is how the donor circle/ trust/ethics shifts or evolves into donation/ distrust/moral.

The above examples, on the one hand, show how the unpredictable combination of chains of independent actions can generate perverse effects (even opposite to the planned goals) and on the other hand how perverse effects can be the rule (not the exception). The system of communication alters the perception of social facts, building a close relationship between prejudice and stereotype. The media increase the triggering of perverse effects. A society that communicates a lot, increases the phenomenon without having any chance of managing it. In times of crisis this state of affairs is further accentuated.

This is why rational decision-making in complex communication systems in times of crisis produces the same results as a random decision[53].

Both perverse and virtuous effects feed prejudices and stereotypes. From an etymological point of view, the term prejudice indicates a judgment that precedes experience, made in the absence of sufficient data.

The social sciences have taken an interest in prejudice, incorporating the additional meaning of misconception and obstacle to knowledge[54].

There is a maximum level of generalization of the term (prejudice as a judgement preceding experience) which could lead us to conclude that 'everything is prejudice', considering it an unchangeable characteristic of

---

53 On this topic: S. D'Alessandro, *Creatività: normalissima improbabilità?* Aracne, 2010.
54 M. Mazzara, *Stereotipi e pregiudizi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997; P.L. Berger T. Luckmann, *La realtà come costruzione sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997.

mankind. This level does not allow to propose an analysis of prejudices aimed at finding strategies to reduce them and, after all, it also includes prejudices that do not pose any social problem.

But there are prejudices that arise from a deliberately distorted and consciously incomplete use of data and that determine an unjustifiably unfavourable (or favourable) perception of the phenomena examined.

Alongside the concept of prejudice, in a relationship of implication, there is the stereotype[55] which constitutes the "cognitive nucleus of prejudice"[56]: the set of information and beliefs relating to a certain category of objects, reworked into a coherent and rather stable image, capable of directing the evaluation of the data in the direction of prejudice[57].

As Lyotard already pointed out in 1979, in post-modern society culture becomes an object of stereotypical consumption and simplification: intellectuals no longer guide the processes of change, evolving into mere media entertainers who have to build numerous generalizations in a short time.

Tenbruck, again in 1979, states that all societies, except today's, have had to rely on some intellectual authority that could successfully declare a superior knowledge of society[58].

The societies of the past needed an intellectual class to be addressed (whether philosophers, priests, poets, scientists or academics), while in post-modern society, cultured leadership is marginalized.

It is not recognized as the holder of legitimate, credible and indisputable knowledge. Moreover, for the first time, knowledge becomes simply a commodity, consumption and form of entertainment.

The web has simply accentuated a phenomenon that was already present in previous decades. In the last 40 years we have witnessed the progressive construction of a redundant and pervasive system-communication that has overturned the relationship of force with social, cultural and political reality, gradually replacing the aforementioned systems.

---

55 Stereotype is a term coming from the typographic environment where it was coined towards the end of the eighteenth century to indicate the reproduction of printed images by means of fixed forms. The first translated use of this term was made in psychiatry, in reference to pathological behaviour characterized by obsessive repetitiveness of gestures and expressions. The introduction into the social sciences is due to the journalist Walter Lippmann who in 1922 published an innovative volume on the processes of public opinion formation, arguing that the cognitive relationship with reality is not direct, but mediated by mental images (stereotypes) that everyone forms because they are conditioned by the press.

56 In Mazzara, M. 1997, p. 16.

57 S. D'Alessandro, *La ricostruzione Post-Sisma della città de L'Aquila come fenomeno mediatico* in «Sociologia e Politiche Sociali Fascicolo» n. 3/2018, pp. 161-162.

58 F. Tenbruck, *Sociologia della cultura*, Bulzoni, Roma, 2002 (1979), p. 50.

Baudrillard in 1980 spoke of 'perfect crime': the disappearance of reality, replaced by a hyper-reality that simulates the intentions of the social. Donolo analyzes the behavior of ruling classes homogenized by the media process, attentive to representation, but unable to change processes. Culture no longer changes the social, it no longer functions as a collective resource capable of regenerating social capital. Intellectuals are unable to align institutional expectations with social ones, because they are silenced by the dictatorship of communication, the container-vector that replaces contents and agents. Observing the historical evolution of the Italian mass media, starting from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day, we can distinguish:

- a first phase in which the mass media accompanied the modernization process of the country, just out of the Second World War, becoming important spreaders and repeaters of the socio-cultural goals that are collectively shared[59], contributing to the construction of a collective ethics based on the re-construction of a world open to better possibilities, orienting a balanced relationship between freedom and social equity, state and market, welfare and self-realization;

- a second phase, starting from the 1970s in which politics - parliamentary and extra-parliamentary - used the ability of the media to change attitudes and behaviors, in order to build or destroy consensus, fueling a strategy of tension and ideological conflict between classes through the recurring practice of counter-information;

- a third phase, inaugurated by the crisis of the first Republic - exacerbated by the decline of parties, the deregulation of the market, the weakening of the welfare state, the betrayal of the generational pact, the crisis of training agencies (schools and universities) and the failure of the world of traditional information - in which socially significant spaces have been progressively eroded, replaced by a communicative system that has built a dissonant and antagonistic narrative with respect to the institutions it claims to replace. This phase breaks the pact of accompaniment and connection between civil society and institutions. Mass media from accompanying tools for democratization and modernization processes, evolve into constructors of conflicts, prejudices and stereotypes aimed at delegitimizing the other social, political and cultural components of the system[60].

---

59 M. Morcellini, *La società che comunica,* in R. Cipriani (a cura di), *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia,* Maggioli, Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna, 2018, p. 275.
60 M. Morcellini, 2018, pp. 278-280.

Simone D'Alessandro

In the current social system, communication is not a collateral element, but it is the system that claims to make up for the shortcomings of the other components.

We are talking about a communication system - and not an information system - because the communicative universe is much more complex: it is that set of mediated and immediate, traditional and digital, interpersonal and cross-media components that cross social networks including, excluding or mingling with information supported by verified sources.

The system is not based on the credibility of the source or on the legitimacy of those who convey it, but on the pervasiveness of its planning, on the needs of its target and on the verisimilitude (non-truthfulness) of a social fact.

Following this logic, we accept what is imposed on us and if the information is denied *a posteriori* it does not weaken, but remains anchored to a system of beliefs and is, generally, indelible and unchangeable, because it is difficult to trace, despite the existence of the 'oblivion right'.

In the communication system there is not only the communication generated by the human, but also that processed automatically by the algorithms that feed what the human produces or searches. This hypertrophy of the infosphere - conscious or automatic - increases anomic effects, paradoxes and contradictions that contribute to the misalignment between collective trust and intersubjective trust systems, between ethics and personal morality.

If it is true, as noted in the previous paragraphs, that ethics can be fueled by trust, otherwise its practical behavior is demotivated and moved to other places, it is equally true that a communication system unable to synchronize with the values and expectations of civil society, collapses the circle of trust or displaces it. When ethics and trust are not reflected in everyone's community, they recreate themselves in small communities that pursue their own particular interests.

In 1994, before the advent of the web, Karl Popper suggested the idea of finding a limit to communicative hypertrophy.

The Austrian epistemologist argued that whoever manages a medium has a high responsibility towards society and therefore it is necessary that he be evaluated by the Government and that he is granted an authorization to carry out his work only if in possession of the necessary requirements, as for those who drive a car or care for the sick. An authorization that can also be withdrawn if the person to whom it was granted does not adopt ethical principles[61].

The system that selects those who should intervene to sanction those who do not communicate information correctly should be public, not contaminated by market rules or lobbies. It should also be an independent system with respect to

---

61 K. Popper, *Cattiva maestra televisione*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1994.

the registers or disciplinary commissions of the category, because each register defends the members of its own category in a self-referential way.

Obviously, this system too could be easily circumvented, but it would be a way to constitute a *super partes* category capable of regulating the positive and negative flows of information. If those who communicate with a large audience repeatedly behave irresponsibly or promote misperception by manipulating data, they should be prosecuted.

This thought by Popper has been endorsed by other studies that have demonstrated the persuasive power of communication tools, their ability to change attitudes and behaviors (desensitization to violence, detachment from politics, increase in narcissism, consumerist indoctrination, etc.)[62].

The persuasive effects of communication have been studied by social psychology: coherence, repetition, auctoritas, scarcity, empathy, sympathy, motivation are the basic principles of persuasion[63].

These principles modify the attitudes of the subject, affecting the automatic behaviors of System 1. Trust means developing a relationship based on the perception we have of a person, an institution or an informal group.

Perception feeds, positively or negatively, the halo effect described in the previous paragraphs. Ethical behavior is altered or blocked by perception.

Acting ethically means trusting in one's own values, but also in the feedback and appreciation of the community of reference. If the social actor develops the perception that his way of behaving is not appreciated, he could change his behavior or address this orientation to a smaller circle of people.

Failure, alteration and displacement of the trust/ ethics/ gift circle depend on perception, the outcomes of which are not predictable a priori, as shown in the examples examined.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the relational links proposed in the previous paragraphs, we can conclude that giving confidence reduces the complexity of relationships and decision-making processes (decreasing the cognitive load that would be determined if we had to research the credibility of any person or organization with whom we want to establish relations) and belongs structurally to human relations.

---

62 G. Bettetini, A. Fumagalli, *Quel che resta dei media,* Franco Angeli, Milano,1998.
63 R. B. Cialdini, *Le armi della persuasione,* Giunti, Firenze, 1995.

Simone D'Alessandro

The building of trust relies on relationships that are repeated over time and evolve into recurring and reliable relationships: this requires a long time and consistency in the way we behave.

A single element of inconsistency, compared to previous exchanges, could undermine the foundations of Trust, while distrust takes root quickly and expands rapidly. Trust is ambivalent, fragile and generating social actions with unexpected outcomes, even perverse and paradoxical.

This denies any functionalist attempt to engineer and optimize performance.

The ambivalence of trust, in terms of social practices, represents a strength from an evolutionary point of view, because its reversal in distrust creates limits to gambling.

Contemporary society is subject to greater risks linked to trust, because globalization on the one hand has weakened emotional and family ties, and on the other has forced each social actor to make rapid choices with people from worlds and cultures that are not consonant with their own.

Consequently, in our world, relying on trust has become a necessity and a recurring and fast practice. Trust represents a particular form of gift that obliges, in a lateral way, reciprocity. Just as the gift is triggered by trust, in an action of liking or reciprocity on the part of the other.

In the circular relationship between gift and trust - terms that could be defined as co-causative of a relationship - gratuitousness and obligation, spontaneity and constraint, generosity and debt, interest and disinterest, recognition and servitude, exchange and conflict are combined.

This dialectical dynamic allows the gift and trust to found the social bond, the legal relationship, the economic exchange, the political pact, the moral obligation and the religious behaviour.

Reflexivity on gift and trust is typical of contemporary society because the risk has increased.

Therefore, gift and trust take on stronger moral connotations than in the past.

From the sociological point of view, trust can be personal or systemic, strategic or intuitive, but in collective processes the intuitive/ moralistic/ emotional one prevails, because all the processes concerning recurring collective behaviours cannot be taken slowly and on the basis of accurate information searches, otherwise our daily regularity would be missed[64].

The ambivalences of intuitive trust can lead to forms of collaboration, exchange and economic reciprocity; but they can also give rise to forms of blackmail or represent mere expedients of manipulation.

---

64 Giddens defines them: ontological securities in A. Giddens, *The consequences of Modernity,* Standford University Press, Stanford (CA), 1990.

What we can say with certainty about these two terms is that they are processes, relationships, meta-relational devices that:

- Consolidate or weaken a bond.
- Generate expectations that can be respected or disregarded.
- They produce obligations of various kinds that can be fulfilled or evaded.
- Can generate good practices or perverse effects.

Trust and gift, from whatever ontological and social perspective they are grasped, are at the basis of the relationship and builders of all cooperative and solidarity-based behaviour, but also behaviour that can generate distrust and refusal of gift (in the double meaning of lack of generosity towards the other and ingratitude when the other gives us something), triggering behaviour that affects the low propensity to respect a shared ethical or personal moral code. Reasoning in systemic terms, there is a structural coupling between trust and ethics, being two particular forms of gift.

Reasoning in relational terms, trust and ethics mark the daily construction or destruction of social bonds, founding the emerging basis of any action or behaviour generated by expectation. Ethics - like trust - is also a particular form of gift that can trigger ambiguous social practices: obligation and concession, interest and disinterest, expectation and desire.

Ethics is intimately linked to intuitive trust (because it is guided by value, emotional and experiential references, expressed by the person who grants trust). Therefore, giving trust is a moral act that negotiates with collective ethics. Ethics, while inspiring law, includes what law excludes, accepting the dialectic with what is unethical.

Ethics is a process that goes beyond the functional concept, negotiating with what is other than itself, triggering an effect of reciprocity typical of the relationship and generating perverse, negative and unforeseen effects further fuelled by the distorting effects of a contemporary system in which communication is no longer a collateral element, but a dominant system that claims to make up for the shortcomings of the other components of society.

The specific examples examined in the previous paragraphs demonstrate the ambiguities and paradoxes generated by the relationship between ethics and trust, altered or distorted by a pervasive, automatic (not guided by an intellectual class) communication system that feeds the construction of stereotypes and prejudices, without supporting cohesive processes and shared goals.

In societies where trust prevails over distrust, there is a reduction in the phenomenon of corruption and social conflicts. But this does not mean that societies where corruption, nepotism or tax fraud reign, have a high rate of distrust.

Criminal organizations are communities where interpersonal trust is high and replaces systemic trust. It follows that distrust in a social actor or an institution

does not lead to widespread distrust, but builds and regenerates trust with alternative social actors. For this reason, it becomes fundamental to create a pact with the communication system that is able to increase the visibility of good practices.

In conclusion, after following a theoretical logical method[65], unfolded in stages along the paragraphs, we can state, with a certain degree of consistency, that:

- Trust and ethics are particular forms of gift and constitutive foundations of the relationship.
- Trust and ethics imply a co-obligation.
- Trust and ethics are ambivalent in nature - like all forms of gift - because they oscillate between freedom and constraint and because they change their meta-relational forms according to contexts.
- The violation of trust determines the violation of ethics and vice versa, implying the deactivation of the circle (with relative failure of the relationship) or its displacement to other areas of action (regeneration in other communities).
- Trust and ethics are necessary conditions, but not sufficient to generate social cohesion and cooperation; they can also be used as justification for incorrect, violent, destructive behaviour in a logic of moralistic conflict between antagonistic positions.

References

[1]   Adkins, A. (1987). *La morale dei greci da Omero ad Aristotele*. Bari: Laterza.

[2]   Alexander, J. (1983). The New Theoretical Movement. (pp. 77-101). In Smelser, N.J. *Handbook of Sociology,* Newbury Park: Sage.

[3]   Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.

[4]   Bettetini, G.; Fumagalli, A. (1998). *Quel che resta dei media.* Milano: Franco Angeli.

[5]   Berger, P.L.; Luckmann, T. (1997). *La realtà come costruzione sociale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

65 Alexander, J. (1983). The New Theoretical Movement. (pp. 77-101). In Smelser, N.J. *Handbook of Sociology,* Newbury Park: Sage.

[6] Bianchi, L.; Liani, S. (2017). Fidarsi della fiducia? Uno studio sull'intensione del concetto. *Quaderni di Sociologia*, V. LXI, n. 74.

[7] Boarelli, M. (2019). *Contro L'ideologia del merito.* Bari-Roma: Laterza.

[8] Boudon, R. (1981). *Gli effetti perversi dell'azione sociale.* Milano: Feltrinelli.

[9] Cialdini, R. B. (1995). *Le armi della persuasione.* Firenze: Giunti.

[10] Colozzi, I. (2006). *Capitale sociale delle famiglie e processi di socializzazione.* Milano: Franco Angeli.

[11] Crespi, F. (2018). *La sociologia come conoscenza e l'ambivalenza dell'agire sociale.* In Cipriani, R. (a cura di). *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia.* Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli.

[12] D'Alessandro, S. (2019). The reflective relationships between society and technology. In *Scienza e Filosofia*, n. 21.

[13] D'Alessandro, S. (2019). *La maggioranza silenziosa e la fine del sociale. Riflessioni su Baudrillard.* In *Scienza e Filosofia*, n. 21.

[14] D'Alessandro, S. (2018). La ricostruzione Post-Sisma della città de L'Aquila come fenomeno mediatico. In *Sociologia e Politiche Sociali Fascicolo*, n. 3.

[15] D'Alessandro, S. (2014). *L'identità della differenza. Ripensare la relazione nei sistemi sociali*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

[16] D'Alessandro, S. (2012). Sociology and the 21st Century: Breaking the Deadlock and Going Beyond the Post-modern Meta-reflection Through the Relational Paradigm. In *World Future: The Journal of Global Education*, 68:4-5, 258-272.

[17] D'Alessandro, S. (2010). Creatività: normalissima improbabilità? Per un dialogo sociologico tra problema e soluzione. Roma: Aracne.

[18] Derrida, J. (1996). *Donare il tempo. La moneta falsa*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

[19] Donati, P. (2009). *Teoria relazionale della società.* Milano: Franco Angeli.

[20] Donati, P. (1993). *La cittadinanza societaria.* Bari-Roma: Laterza.

[21] Duffy, B. (2019). *I rischi della percezione. Perché ci sbagliamo su quasi tutto.* Torino: Einaudi.

[22] Durkheim, E. (1971). *La divisione del lavoro sociale*. Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.

Simone D'Alessandro

[23] Durkheim, E. (1895). *Règles de la méthode sociologique*. Trad. it. (1966). *Le regole del metodo sociologico*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.

[24] Duru-Bellat, M. (2006). *L'inflation scolaire. Les désillusions de la méritocratie*. Paris: Seuil.

[25] Falcone, R. (2020). Castelfranchi C., Colì E., *Corona Virus e Fiducia*. www.cnr.it/sites/default/files/public/media/rassegna_stampa/cnr%20ist c_nota_coronavirus%20e%20fiducia_una%20ricerca%20esplorativa-2.pdf [accessed: July 15, 2020].

[26] Fanciullacci, R. (2012). Il circolo della fiducia e la struttura dell'affidarsi. *Ethics & Politics*1 XIV.

[27] Ferrarotti, F. (2018). *La sociologia come analisi critica della società*. in Cipriani, R. (a cura di). *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia*. Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli.

[28] Festa, R. (2007). Teoria dei giochi ed evoluzione delle norme morali. *Ethics & Politics*, IX, pp. 148-181.

[29] Gallino, L. (1993). *Dizionario di sociologia*.Torino: UTET.

[30] Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of Modernity*. Stanford (CA): Standford University Press.

[31] Godbout, J.T. (1993). Lo *spirito del dono*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

[32] Iannuzzi, I. (2017). La fiducia e il dono. Due risorse relazionali nel panorama sociale contemporaneo. In *Storiadelmondo* n. 85.

[33] Kahneman, D. (2012). *Pensieri lenti e veloci*. Milano: Mondadori.

[34] Laurent, E. (2013). *Economia della fiducia*. Roma: Lit Edizioni.

[35] Luhmann, N. (1979). *Trust and Power*. Chichester West Sussex: John Wiley&Sons Ltd.

[36] Luzzi, R. (2014). *Il dono degli antichi*. In Olivieri, U.M.; Luzzi, R. *Comunità e reciprocità. Il dono nel mondo antico e nelle società tradizionali*. Pomigliano d'Arco: Diogene.

[37] Marci, T. (2012). *Il circolo della gratuità. Il paradosso del dono e la reciprocità sociale*. Trento: Tangram.

[38] Mauss, M. (2002). *Saggio sul dono. Forma e motivo dello scambio nelle società arcaiche*. Torino: Einaudi. (*Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, 1ª ed. 1925).

[39] Mazzara, M. (1997). *Stereotipi e pregiudizi*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

[40] Moellering, G. (2001). The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension. *Sociology*, 35, 2.

[41] Morcellini, M. (2018). *La società che comunica.* In Cipriani, R. (a cura di), *Nuovo Manuale di Sociologia.* Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli.

[42] Pavanello, M. (2008). *Dono e merce: riflessione su due categorie sovradeterminate.* In Aria, M.; Dei F. *Culture del dono.* Roma: Meltemi.

[43] Popper, K. (1994). *Cattiva maestra televisione.* Milano. Feltrinelli.

[44] Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: The Civic Tradition in Italy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[45] Satta, G. (2011). *L'ambiguità del dono. Note su dono, violenza e potere nell'Essai di Mauss.* In Rasini, V. *Aggressività. Un'indagine polifonica*, Milano: Mimesis.

[46] Segre, S. (2019). *Le teorie sociologiche contemporanee.* Roma: Carocci.

[47] Siciliano, C. T. (2015). Come promuovere la cultura dell'etica e della legalità per uno sviluppo sostenibile delle comunità. In *Labour&Law Issues*, Vol. 1, n. 2.

[48] Simmel, G. (1988). *Sociologia.* Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, Milano.

[49] Tartaglia Polcini, G. (2019). *La corruzione tra realtà e percezione*: www.italiandiplomaticacademy.org/la-corruzione-tra-realta-e-rappresentazione-ovvero-come-si-puo-alterare-la-reputazione-di-un-paese/ [accessed: March 21, 2020].

[50] Thaler, R. H.; Sunstein, C. R. (2014). *Nudge. La spinta gentile. La nuova strategia per migliorare le nostre decisioni su denaro, salute e felicità.* Milano: Feltrinelli.

[51] Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The Moral Foundations of Trust.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[52] Warburton, N. (2007). *Il primo libro di filosofia.* Torino: Einaudi.

[53] Weatherford, J. M. (1985). *Tribes on the Hill.* Westport (CT): Bergin & Garvey.

[54] Weber, M. (1922). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen, Mohr; trad. It. *Economia e società.* (1981). Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.

[55] Zucker, L.G. (1986). The Production of Trust: Institutional Sources of Economic Structure, 1840-1920. In *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 8, 53-111.