WHICH ROAD TO FOLLOW? 
THE MORAL COMPLEXITY OF AN ‘EQUIPPED’ HUMANITY

Laurent THEVENOT 
Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale, Paris 
(Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales - CNRS)


1 The first version of this paper «A paved road to civilised beings? Moral treatments of the human attachments to creatures of nature and artifice» was presented at the Presidential Plenary ‘Relating Nature, Objects and the Social. Challenges of a Knowledge Society’ of the Joint meeting of the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology, and the Society for the Social Studies of Science, Bielefeld, October 10-14, 1996. I am grateful to Karin Knorr for her invitation and for further stimulating conversations with her. Peter Meyers was a strong help in the English formulation of my statement, both as an English-speaking native and as a colleague with whom I enjoy regular discussions. Later public presentations at the Institute of French Studies, New York University (1997) and at the Sociology department of University of California Berkeley (1998) helped me to improve the paper. I would especially thank Ann Swidler and Craig Calhoun for their valuable comments. I am extremely grateful to John Law for his patient and enduring efforts to shape the previous version of this paper into a more British form. He is obviously not responsible for the limits of this enterprise.
A séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible... a world without things that are between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it, a world with no in-between which relates and separates men at the same time' (Arendt 1958, pp.52-53).

INTRODUCTION

This is a paper about a ‘sociologie politique et morale’, a political and moral sociology. It is about the way in which persons are evaluated as moral or political agents, and the way things are caught up in such evaluations. We are familiar with the old problem of social ordering, or with more recently explored ways of making entities more general; but how can we speak of political or moral evaluations? This is supposed to be a preserve of political and moral philosophers. But I want to tackle the issue with an orientation unusual among philosophers (with a few famous exceptions including Arendt and Marx), and investigate the moral complexity which results from the ‘furniture’ or ‘equipment’ of humanity.

Much of this chapter explores this question in an experimental mode – it is an experiment to see how it is that objects might participate in the moral world. The experiment is actually a challenge, much like Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*. I limited myself to one kind of object, roads, and explored variations in the ways these are engaged and evaluated. This is not a fancy experiment. I took each of these numerous states of the road – and human beings – from one empirical case. In this experiment I consider how a road – a particular road in the French Pyrénées – comes to take up political and moral attributes and participate in the construction of some common good or more limited evaluation. And this is also an experiment in complexity, moral complexity – for it is going to turn out that the variations of the road shed light on a range of versions of commonality – and on other characterisation of goodness.

Though the chapter is in some sense a sociology of complex objects, it is also, and more fundamentally, a contribution to a sociology of complex political and moral ordering. Thus my fundamental concern is to make a new link between the notion of ‘the good’ (whether from classical political philosophy or from the ordinary grammar of motives) and the notion of ‘the real’ (realism as this is made in science, social science, and everyday encounters with reality). Durkheim made the link in terms of ‘norms’ (the ideal was linked to frequency). Economics makes the connection by talking of ‘equilibrium’. Parts of sociology and political philosophy create it by talking of ‘meaning’ (that is a commonality of understanding demanded by interaction). This chapter makes a link, a new link, in terms of ‘engagement’. Engagement with the world is first a reality test which depends on the way the agent captures the world within a certain type of format (publicly conventionalised, functional, familiar, etc.). But this formatting of a reality depends on a form of evaluation which singles out what is relevant. This evaluation refers to some kind of good which might be a common good, or the fulfilment of a planned action, or an even more localised good governing accommodation with a familiar environment. This chapter explores the composition between different moral orders and more local modes of evaluation as these are embodied in objects acknowledged within different regimes of pragmatic engagements with the world. This in turn leads to new insights into different models of activity: a kind of social action

---

2 In French, the word ‘engagement’ works still better because the notion of both material and moral engagements is highly developed. The key is ‘engaged’ in the lock, just as two parties are ‘engaged’ in a contract (and not just when they are married).
which is more collective than others in so far as it is prepared for public critique and justification, an individual and planned action as associated with intentional agents and a functional capture of the world, a familiar engagement as non-reflexive activity guided by embodied atunement with a domesticated and proximate environment.

UNPACKING THE BASIC TOOL KIT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

A ‘sociologie politique et morale’. Let’s start with a warning. This phrase is potentially misleading. This is because it suggests a sociology of morals and politics, the study of group beliefs about what is right or legitimate. This way of thinking fits with the sociological instinct. For sociologists are experts at making people’s ideas transparent and unveiling the social interests and social laws that shape their ideas. Indeed French social science developed a series of sophisticated tools to do this in the 1970s (Crozier’s ‘strategic behaviour’, Friedberg’s ‘negotiated exchange’, and Bourdieu’s distinctive ‘habitus’ and ‘unconscious strategies’). While researchers in SSK (the sociology of scientific knowledge) have made use of similar approaches to unmask the ideology of scientific epistemology.

However, the research that I have developed in collaboration with Luc Boltanski over a number of years goes in a different direction. (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1983) We wanted to account for the way actors place value on people and things in ways that appear to be more legitimate than others, without reducing these evaluations to other factors. The reason is that these evaluations play a central part in the way actors capture the activity of other actors (or of themselves) to co-ordinate their own conduct (a process which also takes place through conflicts). When sociologists disregard actors’ evaluations as illusory or pure a posteriori reconstructions, they miss a significant part of what evaluation is oriented to: that is, co-ordination.

In this work on critique and justification we studied the relation between generality (which could be reduced to a cognitive necessity) and different kinds of common goods. The tension between the collective and the particular is, of course, both a major preoccupation in everyday life and a crucial issue in social science. And necessarily so, because generalisations and reductions – which tend to become most visible in the critiques and justifications which emerge in the course of disputes – constitute the basic mechanism for making evaluations based on what is common, or communal. They create the link – always a matter of tension – between the general and the particular. It is true that some sociological approaches catch aspects of this tension. For instance, to study how ‘social order’ or ‘common sense’ is maintained is also to study ways in which the tension is resolved in favour of the general, while conversely, studies of ‘social conflict’ or ‘breaching experiments’ show how what is shared may break down. So these studies are important, but they are also limited, tending to restrict tensions either to conflict between collectives or, alternatively, to local breakdowns. Few have explored its full width and dynamics.

This, then, is the point of our ‘sociologie politique et morale’. Our aim has been to transform basic sociological categories by exploring justifications and critiques, and the ways in which these make links between cognitive, moral and material issues. Of course we have been helped in this work by a number of predecessors: Foucault’s insights, in the Order of Things, on epistemic settings and cognitive operations such as ‘making similar’; ethnomethodological studies about the maintenance of common sense; Durkheim’s and Mauss’ version of the sociology of knowledge, and

3 Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991 (on translation at Princeton University Press). For an introduction in English, see Boltanski and Thévenot 1999; for a short presentation of this turn and of the collective research which sustains it, see Thévenot 1995a. For a discussion of this trend and its more recent extensions, see: Wagner 1999; for a comparison with Callon’s and Latour’s framework and a contrast with Bourdieu’s, see: Bénatouïl 1999.
Mauss’ concern with practice which is still influential in Bourdieu’s writing. But our aim has also been different because we have neither wanted to ‘contextualise’ and localise collective claims, nor directly connect them to ‘social structures’ (even when these were embodied in ‘social practices’ or *habitus*). Instead our interest has been in the *operations* needed to move towards commonality and generality, together with their requirements and their failures.

**POLITICAL AND MORAL ARTEFACTS: WHAT THEY ARE CONVENIENT FOR**

How has this sociology of politics and morals developed? A little history and a little context.

Moving from the construction and use of social categories to the larger problem of bringing together and making equivalences and generalities, my first interest was in what I thought of as ‘investments of form’. These are procedures which treat people and objects in homogeneous ways across contexts (Thévenot 1984). For instance, statistical categories, job evaluation scales, or occupational names create *equivalences* between human beings while establishing norms of measurements, standards or properties, that make entities similar. An ‘investment in form’ is costly and demands negotiation, but the cost may be offset by ‘returns’ in co-ordination which depend on the extension of its domain within which it is accepted.

In this work cognition was linked to co-ordination. Objects and objectivity offer strong mediations in making this link. The argument runs so: different ‘investments of forms’ generate different ‘forms of the probable’, different constraints on what can be proved and offered as relevant evidence. For instance statistical probability is quite different from evidence based on proximity to a prototype. But both rest in part on material evidence and the involvement of objects, even if what counts as relevant evidence is quite different in the two cases. Objects in series – one after the other – are needed for law-like probability, whereas personalised and localised things are involved in the kind of plausibility which is anchored in proximity. And this is a crucial move. Co-ordination depends on cognition, but cognitive forms vary with the way in which people – and other entities too – are treated. Which leads us to explore different kind of access to reality and realism.

So how do politics and morals enter the scene? The answer is that they do so if we elaborate the notion of co-ordination. For we do not see co-ordination as a law-like process mainly determined by forces, constraints, rules, dispositions, *habitus* and all the rest. The undetermined, dynamic and creative aspects of co-ordination arise instead from the operations of evaluation which actors depend on for the conduct of their action and their selective access to reality. This is the point at which objects and objectivity get deeply connected with morals and politics. Luc Boltanski and I first investigated this connection at the level of the legitimate modes of evaluation involved in large-scale criticism and justification. And a central part of this process is ‘qualification’: how people and things are treated and shaped to qualify for evaluation. Thus in the way in which we use the term, qualification builds a bridge between operations of evaluation and the realist conditions for an effective engagement with the world.

The connection between evaluation (with an orientation towards the good) and realism has been obscured by the historical construction of sociology on the model of the nomological sciences. Since the idea that objects and morals are intertwined seems to be something of a blind spot in

---

4 This concern with the involvement of "non-human" beings has been influenced by the research program at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris. (Callon and Latour, 1981). However, the connection with morals is quite different as it will become clear in what follows.
social science, I want to make a short detour to talk about the 18th Century Natural Law theorists. For in these writers we find that objects are treated as artificial 'moral Entities' endowed with moral capacities. For instance Pufendorf writes:

«We may define our moral Entities to be certain Modes superadded to natural Things and Motions by understanding Beings, chiefly for the guiding and tempering of the Freedom of voluntary Actions, and for the procuring of a decent Regularity in the Method of Life.» (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 3).

In Pufendorf's way of thinking, a moral entity is more than a shared understanding, as it is in contemporary social sciences. Human beings «are endu’d with the Power of producing them», a power which «assigns them such and such Effects» (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 1):

«Men likewise [Almighty God] were impowered to give a Force to their Inventions of the same Kind, by threatening some Inconvenien ce, which their Strength was able to make good against those who should not act conformably to them.» (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 4).

Pufendorf identifies 'modes of estimation' according to which «both Things and Persons may be rated and valu’d» (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 17). The latter render persons, things and actions suitable to be 'estimated' through a moral 'quantity'. Estimation is the key term here. Pufendorf is concerned to show how persons and things are estimated in similar ways, noting that the Latin word 'valor' applies to both (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 17)\(^5\). His suggestion is that the 'moral quantity' of things relates to price, while the moral quantity of persons, their «Degree of the Rate and Value», is measured in terms of «Repute». But in each case the concern is similar. The reason for attaching a certain price to things is chiefly in order to compare them exactly in an exchange, or a transport to someone else. In like manner, esteem is used to settle the weight we accord to human beings the ones relative to the others, and to be able to rank them in a convenient order when they find themselves together, since experience shows that it is impossible to treat them in the same way, and not to set up any difference between persons (Pufendorf 1749, II, V; IV, 1).

Estimation «frames» moral entities in certain «states» which «contain them, and in which they perform their operations. These states take place in an artificial «space» devised by mankind, a space of linkages with other things which contribute to «hold and sustain» these states:

«Hence a State may not improperly be defin’d a moral Entity fram’d and taken up on Account of the Analogy it bears to Space. And as Space seems no principal and original Being, but is devis’d, to be, as it were, spread under other Things, to hold and to sustain them is some particular Manner, so the several States were not introduc’d for their own Sakes, but to make a Field for moral Persons to exist in.» (Pufendorf 1749, I, I, I, 6).

**From legal moral beings to qualifications in everyday disputes**

So objects and people are jointly involved in the evaluations needed for co-ordination. Both have moral qualities, and each varies in value. But as Pufendorf recognises, this sits uneasily with the idea of equality of human beings in a state of nature as posited by Natural Law theorists. This concern with equality also features in everyday debates about justice and injustice. And the

---

\(^5\) Barbeyrac adds, in his earlier French translation, that the French word ‘valeur’ ‘never applies to persons in order to indicate the esteem they are given’ (Pufendorf 1771, III, 21). This observation is no longer valid. I thank Abigail Saguy for having made available to me the English translation of Pufendorf’s The Laws of Nature and Nation.
resolution of the tension between an order of evaluation and equal dignity amongst human beings lies at the very core of the common requirements met by the range of orders of worth used in these critical debates. In contrast to law theorists, we are also interested in how judgements are made in non-legal arenas (Thévenot 1992). The kind of moral entities that are commonly used for the evaluations and rankings of everyday life depart in some ways from legal artefacts. Four are particularly important.

1. **From persona moralis composita to configuration of the collective**: Pufendorf's construction rests on a theory of covenant as the mode of interaction, and a theory of the autonomy of the will as the mode of human agency. The latter is fundamental to the arrangement of covenants. This means that his moral beings presuppose that events should be grasped through ‘individuals’ ‘individual will’, and ‘individual action’. But if we need to question assumptions about the nature of the collective, then we also need to raise questions about the character of the individual and of action. Instead, we need to argue that ‘individuals’, ‘wills’ and ‘actions’, like ‘moral qualities’ or ‘quantities’, are kinds of moral artefacts and that they work only by engaging in certain ways with the material world. For instance, the autonomous intentional individual is usually regarded as a prerequisite for moral agency. But it achieves such moral agency only with the support of other elements – the functional agency of objects – which together characterise a regime of engagement amongst others. In saying this, the aim is not to unmask the illusions of individual and intentional agency – something which often appeals to sociologists as they struggle with economics or legal theory. Rather we are interested in how this form of agency works and what it is convenient for (Thévenot 1990b).

2. **From legal enforcement to practical co-ordination**: this suggests the need for second move away from Natural Law theory. Reflecting on the efficacy of moral beings, Pufendorf suggests that conformity results from repressive force. As such it is a standard legal account of how qualities are enforced by law – and also fits comfortably with the perspective of an absolutist state. But our approach to everyday morality needs to be broader for our concern is not with law but with the various modes of co-ordination in everyday disputes. This means that we need to forge conceptual tools that account for the dynamics of evaluation and re-evaluation, and the ways in which evaluations are put to some kind of reality test. What is at stake in everyday disputes is not the determination of actions by values. Instead there is a dynamic and creative process in which new and ‘qualified’ persons and things are grasped. For instance, if we think of ‘moral quality’ as ‘price’, then this implies a particular mode of co-ordination which is neither war between states nor physical struggle (though violent contests are never far removed). Instead it has to do with general forms of evaluation. The argument, then, is that we will need to extend morality to cover all the standard forms of evaluation, whether or not these are commonly treated as ‘moral’ matters.

3. **The co-ordinating capacities of qualified beings**: this suggests we need to move from Pufendorf in a third respect, from a focus on instruments of legal and state power and police to the conventions involved in everyday disputes and judgements; to what one might think of as the policing of everyday contests. Enforcing conventions in everyday ‘policing’ is clearly less constraining than enforcement based on a state monopoly of violence. But there are other differences too. First, unlike legal disputes within the legal arena, those in everyday life are not conventionally closed to the same extent. Second, everyday disputes and co-ordinations depend

---

6 Or ‘fictions’ or ‘fable’ as Pufendorf says and Locke, following him: Locke The second treatise of government II (1666 [1690]).

on more than the shared ‘conventions’ of background knowledge, taken for granted assumptions, or reciprocal typifications which are put forward in verstehende or interpretative sociology. For (here are the objects again) the equipment of everyday discipline is largely supplied by the resistance offered by qualified entities. For instance, market co-ordination through price rests on a series of conventions (to do not only with money but also the identity of the goods). It also, however, depends on the concrete ability to privatise objects, to take them away, to withhold them through private ownership. In short, it is not only, as the English put it, that ‘possession is nine tenths of the law’. It is also a large part of economic co-ordination too.

4. **The multiplicity of general qualifications**: So different objects – or objects that participate in social relations in different ways – may support distinct modes of co-ordination. But this suggests a final shift from Pufendorf. When he talks of ‘moral quality’ he talks, as I noted above, of ‘price’ for things, and ‘esteem’ for persons. But as I have tried to show in work with Luc Boltanski, this is too restricted to account for evaluations in contemporary disputes. Instead there are a number of different modes of legitimate evaluation or ‘orders of worth’.8 A number of points about these ‘orders of worth’.

First, each implies a different configuration of commonality which may or may not have to do with what sociologists think of as ‘social groups’ or ‘communities’. Thus, while it may be that ‘civic’ or ‘domestic’ worth and commonality relate to recognisable social collectivities (respectively: social groups linked by solidarity and communities based on custom), the solidarity of ‘industrial worth’ rests, quite differently, on standardised techniques and technologies; or, another example, the fame of the ‘worth of renown’ depends on signs of recognition and the media which diffuse these.

Second, each links judgements of worth to the common good as it seeks to resolve the tension between justice based on equal dignity of human beings, on the one hand, and the ordering involved in evaluation, on the other. Not all forms of evaluation can be made compatible with common humanity. Several requirements are shared by all the legitimate orders of worth. One first major requirement is the connection between worth and a common good. In other words, people thought to be more worthy are also supposed to sustain some sort of commonality and are taken, in one way or another, to be more ‘collective’ than the less worthy.

Third, each attribution of worth is submitted to critical evaluations. Another major requirement for making compatible orders of worth and common humanity is the rejection of any permanent attribution of worth to persons, as would be the case with some kinds of status or innate properties. An order of worth cannot be built on IQ9. The attribution of worth should always be open to question because of the risk which ordering raises with regard to common humanity. Stabilised characterisations are regarded as unjust in so far as the attribution of worth is not submitted to critical assessment relating to commonalities and common good. Prices, technical efficiency, reputation, fame, collective solidarity, inspiration – all of these are bases for assessing or denying worth. Another source of critique comes from the conflicting relationships between different orders of worth. Each kind of worth aspires to a general extension while seeking to reduce the others in denunciations, though they may also compromise and become compatible within certain limits.

---

8 In On Justification we brought together two types of texts. On the one hand, we looked at some of the classics of political philosophy which we treated as works by grammarians of the political bond seeking discursive solutions to the problem of agreement: Augustine, Bossuet, Hobbes, Rousseau, Smith, Saint-Simon. On the other hand, we considered a series of contemporary handbooks or guides to good behaviour.

9 Alexis Carrel tried to build the common good of a ‘cité eugénique’, see: Thévenot 1990a.
Finally, qualification for worth needs to be tested. And this is the key connection between an evaluative orientation towards the good, and a realist encounter with the world. Evaluative judgements, in the sense of these orders of worth, are not only *topoi* in rhetorics. They are put to tests involving tangible things. Things are made general and become relevant pieces of evidence in very different ways depending on the orders of worth which specify the kind of agreement implied by objectivity.

**THE RÉGIME OF PUBLIC CRITIQUE AND JUSTIFICATION : A PLURALITY OF WORTHY ROADS**

So how do objects and their arrangements participate in the moral world?

The Somport tunnel.\textsuperscript{10} This was a proposal to build a highway through the Apse valley, one of the high valleys of the Pyrénées, continuing a tunnel through the mountains which separate France from Spain. This is the object which I will explore, an object of dispute, debate and negotiation. And my exploration – and those disputes – is all about the what counts, or should count, as a ‘good road’ and what is the reality of such a road.

Aristotelians would argue that to talk of a road is to assume the idea of a good road in terms of teleological functionality. They would therefore reject any is/ought distinction (MacIntyre 1984, p.58). But in what follows I want to account for a diversity of good roads. To be sure, a kind of teleological regime of planned action involves functional agency and intentional agency. Looked at in this way a good road is simply the proper device to allow the action of transportation. We shall return to such a regime in the next section. But disagreements about a fit and proper road raise other kinds of issues about the goodness of the road when conflicting claims aim at generalisation. At such moments people involved in the dispute shift to a régime of justification which links goodness to legitimate orders of worth.

And this is precisely the situation for the Somport proposal. As the dispute unfolded people found that they had to *allocate worth* (and not simply functional value) to the road. And this is where we meet the kind of ‘moral being’ which has to qualify for worthiness. Within the *regime of justification*, the evaluation of qualified entities involved many more entities than the object’s functional agency and the intentional agency of the planner. Webs of connections with other entities were unfolded, and the grammars which governed these connections started to become clear. For to qualify or to disqualify the road, connections with other already qualified and less controversial beings were made. Entities were arranged and made coherent in terms of worth within different logics of evaluation. And those logics were, or so I will try to demonstrate, relatively constraining\textsuperscript{11} So what are those logics? What are those forms of evaluation? How were

\textsuperscript{10} The French survey of this conflict was done with the collaboration of Marie-Noël Godet and Claudette Lafaye. For a more complete analysis in French, see Thévenot (1996a, 1996b). This survey was continued by a comparative one, conducted with Michael Moody, focusing on a conflict raised by the project of a dam in a California Sierra river. This comparative survey took place in a more general four years program of comparative research on forms of justification and repertoires of evaluation in France and the US. Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot were responsible for this project; see: Lamont and Thévenot (2000). On the comparison of the two environmental conflicts and differences between French and US politics, see: Moody and Thévenot (2000); Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye (2000), Thévenot and Lamont (2000).

\textsuperscript{11} Here we differ from actor-network theory in so far as we focus on: the coherence which is required by the critical testing of arrangements, the critical tensions raised by composite
A highway of market worth: opening landlocked areas to market competition

The road and tunnel were conceived and backed by the European Council as part of a policy for completing a transport infrastructure in order to create an ‘integrated market’. The European Commissioner responsible for Regional Policies argued that the decision to support the project underlined ‘the increasing importance of trans-frontier co-operation in the Community’s policies. The tunnel will form part of the overall development of the Pau-Zarogossa region of the E07 motorway.’ General priorities included the following: to ‘integrate areas which are either landlocked or situated on the periphery of the Community’; to ‘reduce costs associated with transit traffic in co-operation with any non-member countries concerned’. Once the tunnel was built, ‘heavy goods vehicles are expected to have their transit crossing cut by 40 minutes.’ These are the reasons the European Community offered partial funding for the project. It wanted to promote competition and free markets by improving transport. This is a market qualification for the road. It works by creating links with other beings which are also qualified in terms of their market worth: customers who make transactions (the moral human being is a customer when viewed in relation to the common good of market competition); and trucks which transport goods. Indeed, the road was designated by the EC as the ‘E07 Truck Road’. The legitimate market-connection with heavy and fast transportation results in the design of a road with three and possibly lanes. The fact that this road is qualified for the market is not simply a matter of labelling or rhetoric: it has significant consequences for the reality of the road – in terms of its width, its gradients, and its potential traffic load.

Here is the conclusion: a standard ‘market-qualified’ entity is a marketable good or a service which supports evaluation by means of price, as required for market co-ordination. For transport, market qualification leads to the division of the road into individual customer services – taking, for instance, the form of tolls. Some EC members questioned the market qualification of the road because it was not itself devised for market competitive procedures. It was intended to be a means of improving competition and lowering prices rather than itself being tested in the market.

A first compromised road: a market-industrial infrastructure

Going in this direction, one would argue for a ‘compromised’ road. I use the term ‘compromise’ to mean an attempt to make compatible two (or more) orders of worth within the process of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). But compromises are not simply juxtaposed justifications. They become solid because they are built up and reinforced over time, being entrenched within material arrangements. And it is because it takes the form of durable infrastructure and not a short-term renewable commodity that the road is a compromised being, meeting the requirements for worth not only in market but also in industrial terms.

12 One might fruitfully parallel this notion of compromise, and compromised device, with the concept of ‘boundary object’ (Star and Griesemer 1989, Fujimura 1992). The focus on ‘translation’ also highlights the role played by such intermediaries (Callon et Law 1989).
An investment of industrial worth: an efficient infrastructure for the future

When they are pushed hard, market and industrial qualifications stand in sharp contrast with one another. They may, for instance, denounce each other in terms of time. Whereas market worth is short-term or even timeless in its pure form, industrial worth is deeply time-oriented. Thus the planners concerned by industrial efficiency conceived the road and tunnel in terms of an infrastructure for the future (‘the future needs infrastructure’). This means that investment is a major qualified being or good in a régime of ‘industrial worth’. Technical efficiency is thus connected to a common good through the textures of time and space. Time is future-oriented and the increase in industrial worth takes the form of ‘progress’, and ‘upgrading’: ‘the upgrading of the previous road to a section of the European E07 trunk road is intended to provide a modern link between Bordeaux and Toulouse on the one side and …..’. To be worthy an industrial entity is thus one that builds for the future, making planning possible because it will function reliably. Thus ‘industrial’ space is Cartesian and homogeneous. The spatial infrastructure of modern highways is a condition for a territorial homogeneity which has to be achieved despite natural obstacles. And this spatial homogeneity is also secured by standardisation, which means that a good industrial road should be both durable and consistent with the design standards for high quality roads – for instance with gentle curves, gradients and signposts.

A second compromised road: a market-domestic way of communication that remains local and dominated

The market qualification of the road is promoted ‘from above’ by Brussels and its regulations, rather than ‘from below’ by being tested in a decentralised market. However, local actors also use market qualification to support the road and its tunnel, often adopting a market-domestic compromise encapsulated in the term ‘local trades’ which departs from the terms of the European Community integrated market.

Local marketable goods and services primarily have to do with tourism and recreation. I shall return to the complex of potential justifications enclosed in ‘tourist’ identification later. Market worth is clearly one of them: to be qualified for a market, natural areas have to be shaped as ‘tourist sites’. A road is thus an access to tourist sites and part of the arrangement needed to qualify these sites in terms of market worth as an ‘asset’ made out of nature (‘capital nature’): ‘Thanks to the road, the value of tourist activities will be raised because of improved access to the sites’.

However, within this market-domestic compromise the road is not an axis for increasing trade (as Brussels wishes) but offers access for local trade and tourist sites. Indeed the locals reject a ‘truck corridor’ (as proposed by the pan-European market argument) and favour a road going to and ending within the valley: a way of entering rather than passing through it. A nicely crafted formula says: ‘there is a need for a transport network that will remain in our locale and which we will therefore be able to dominate (maîtriserons).’

A pure market road, a superhighway, would undermine rather contributing to the local tourist trade: ‘At present the tourist industry is completely integrated into the site and it will suffer from the proximity of a high traffic transit route.’

Locals cite the example of the valley of Maurienne where a small road was connected by tunnel to Italy, and the whole valley became exactly the kind of ‘traffic corridor’ that they fear. The road cuts through historic old towns, and the volume of traffic and the frequency of accidents have forced people to leave their homes. Supporters of the market-domestic compromise urge a road that will foster ‘local interaction’ (échanges de proximité), including improved contact with the trades and services of the local town below the valley. One of them mentions the need for such a road if the Aspe bachelors are to find and keep wives: ‘wives should be able to go town, to a restaurant or
the movies, within a half an hour drive and this means improving the present road’. This tells us that the compromised road is not simply a form of words. Its material crafting is just as important if it is to withstand a reality test. It should have short three-lane sections to allow overtaking without being a full three-lane highway that would attract heavy traffic.

**A road of domestic worth: an customary way of integrating locals**

This compromise leads us to what we might call the *domestic* worth of trust. In contrast with the future-orientation of *industrial* time, *domestic* time is oriented towards the values of the past and its precedents. It relates to and generalises habitual linkages and customary practices to make a form of trust that is transportable and transitive. If industrial space is Cartesian or generic, mapped out by co-ordinates, then *domestic* space is polar, raising proximity and neighbourhood into virtues. It is being anchored in a locale, as much as temporal linking, which offers a bedrock for trust. A well-worn path is one of the most basic features of domestic topography, for worth is gained gradually. So the domestic road preserves and consolidates the trails left by customary commerce within an environment. But, local and temporal commitments need to be generalised if they are to escape the space of a specific community and be connected to a general common good. This means that the compromise market-domestic road is a delicate balance which can be split if the test of domestic worth is pushed too far. A local politician declared: ‘With the Somport case, the McDonaldisation of France has reached the front door of Bearn’.

**A famous scenic route of worthy renown**

The qualification of people and things through *renown* or opinion is another legitimate order of worth. Entities are shaped in this order as *signs* or *symbols*. For instance roads become material arrangements which render nature *visible* and recognisable. As sightseeing mechanisms, they offer standpoints which present and repeatedly represent distant panoramas, thereby framing nature as landscape. In the Impact Survey of the project, we find this: ‘The road has strong tourist appeal. It offers travellers the opportunity to discover the landscape and, as such, is an asset to the valley.’ Like the previous qualifications, this is not reduced to a subjective point of view. To be qualified, the road has itself to be ‘integrated’ into the landscape. This involves constraints on its design: ‘Because of its modest size, the road has been integrated for years into the site and is unobtrusive. Together with the villages and the hamlets, it is the best location for discovering the landscape of the valley.’ In France we do not talk of ‘scenic routes’ but of ‘picturesque’ roads. The term is more inclusive. Qualification refers not only to natural features but also to a landscape of domesticated, cultivated and inhabited nature.

**Following the route through other qualifications: civic accesses, inspired ways, green paths**

I want to conclude this section by touching briefly on two further orders of worth. *Civic* worth is oriented towards general interest, equality and solidarity between citizens. In this the road is crucial because it creates a basic territorial equivalence and equality between citizens. Such a civic organisation of a space of equivalence between citizens extends the Revolutionary desire to build a uniform territory by means of legal categories. Compromised with industrial worth in a slogan about ‘improvement of territory’ [*aménagement du territoire*], it is still a primary justification for road-building in France. Weakness in transport infrastructure is denounced in terms of civic worth.

I shall not say much about the worth of *inspiration* although the ‘path’ (whether good or evil)
is central to revelation in ways that are not simply metaphorical. Trails and paths are also qualified ways of experiencing the green worth of an environment, a primary way of integrating human beings into their environment. But paved roads – and still more motorways – are poor candidates for green routes. Instead they are denounced for cutting wildlife trails and migration routes. The response takes the form of compromised green roads: the industrial design includes an additional set of roads for wildlife in the form of bridges and tunnels. Many have been introduced for frogs and the Aspe road project includes a ‘bear-duct’, so called by its opponents who named it after aqua-ducts.

The green denunciation of the market and industrial roads is itself denounced on the grounds of ‘local development’, a compromised common good bringing together market, industrial and domestic forms of worth. Thus the decision of the socialist Ministry of Environment to block the construction of the Somport tunnel was criticised by local officials who said that ‘wider economic concerns were being sacrificed for limited ecological gains’. Critics suggested a test using an industrial form of evidence. Another local politician protested that the tunnel would have taken only 3,580 square yards from a total national park area of 370,000 acres. He said: ‘Under this pretext, they are ready to sacrifice a whole region.

BOUNDED EVALUATIONS AND LOCAL REGIMES OF ENGAGEMENT: OTHER KINDS OF CONVENIENT ROADS

Different forms of agency related to modes of ‘convenience’

I have talked about a number of orders of worth and the character of their justifications: market, industrial, civic, domestic, renown or opinion, and inspiration. In addition I have also considered the ways in which human beings and objects achieve moral or political qualification, either within specific orders of worth, or in more complex and ‘compromised’ systems where orders of worth are juxtaposed.

In this section I extend this to consider the ways in which different kinds of agency and capacity are attributed to human and non-human entities in what I call ‘pragmatic regimes of engagement’. My object is to take the notion of agency beyond the regime of justification so far discussed and focus on the different ways in which human beings engage with their environments of artifice or nature. Thus the notion of ‘pragmatic regime’ would include the collective modes of co-ordination governed by orders of worth, but would also cover other kinds of engagements which are approached in one way or other by social scientists in terms of ‘action’, ‘practice’ and ‘habit’. However, my focus is not so much on the human motor for action, but rather on the dynamics of disagreement and agreement with the environment. The idea is that these dynamics rest on different forms of ‘convenience’, a notion which implies both a form of evaluation and a format within which the environment is captured in order to fit evaluation. I will situate the character of

---

13 For revelation is the crucial test here. For instance, Rousseau experiences a kind of ‘road to Damascus’ when he sees the light on the road to Vincennes, and finds the inspiration to write his Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts.
14 The path consolidates wildlife trails, although Simmel noted that the animal ‘does not create the miracle of the path, i.e., coagulate the movement into a solid structure which gets beyond him’ (Simmel 1988).
15 Introducing the part of my research agenda which followed the work on justification with Luc Boltanski
human agency within this larger framework. Therefore, our inquiry into the moral complexity of equipped humanity proceed by exploring more limited, local or personal evaluations.

Conventional forms of qualification which derive from worthiness differ from more local evaluations which support other pragmatic regimes of convenience (Thévenot 1990b, 2001). The regime of justification is very demanding with respect to moral infrastructure and emotional involvement (Thévenot 1995c). Fortunately, we only need to attend to such a régime when the engagement is open to public critique. Instead, for more limited co-ordination, we interact with others through more bounded engagements. I shall now introduce an architecture which suggests the way this public régime of justification rests on two régimes of more local engagements: a régime of 'planned action'; and a régime of 'familiarity' which governs proximate accommodation and does not require the kind of strong intentional and autonomous agency attributed in planned action. I will try to cope with the challenge of continuing to illustrate these régimes with new variations of the activity of transportation, of its material support (road, path, track, etc.) and of the kind of human agency involved in each régime.

The régime of justification: a joint characterisation of human and non-human beings with conventionalised capacities (qualified roads)

In the régime of justification, human and non-human beings are qualified together as conventional moral beings. Thus a market road supports human beings qualified as customers who seek to make market relations, facilitating relations between customers and goods which qualify as transactions. An industrial road is an efficient infrastructure designed by long-term planners and engineers and competently utilised by professional drivers with reliable vehicles. A domestic road is customarily used by locals and other domestic beings including cattle. A civic road is a potential vehicle for equality and solidarity between citizens, in spite of territorial inequalities.

Attempts to qualify or to extend qualification links an entity of questionable worthiness with others that are less controversial – though the link itself needs to be qualified and made congruent

---

16 The different kinds of agency [agence] that I tried to identify are not reducible to a distinction between human and non-human entities. The common use of the term (which offers in French the relational ‘agencement’) unfortunately points to the first pole of the opposition active/passive. By contrast, I want to encompass both these poles in a range of characterisations of the way entities are engaged. For a subtle analysis of the ‘ontologies of organisms and machines’ in experimental arenas, and of different ‘epistemic practices’, see: Knorr-Cetina 1993, 1995. For stimulating proposals about ‘material agency’ and a comprehensive discussion of this issue (including the ‘Epistemological Chicken’ debate initiated by Collins and Yearley (1992)), see Pickering (1995).

17 John Law draws a salient comparison between the ‘cost of justification’ (we spoke of ‘sacrifice’ in De la justification) and the cost of audit and of the apparatuses of surveillance and reporting that have been put in place for anyone who has to deal with the British state (health service, teachers, universities, etc).

18 In this paper I cannot explore the notion of the pragmatic régime in detail. I have documented this approach in several papers and grounded it in empirical studies (Thévenot 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995b, 1996, 2001). In particular, different investigations have been dedicated to following the "same" object, some consumer good, in different regimes, from the situation of personal and familiar usage in a domestic arena to the most public treatment such as what we observe in European committees which are in charge of the making of safety standards, through the methods and implements of the laboratories that certify their achievement of standardised properties (Thévenot 1993).
with an order of worth. Although the discursive verbal expression of the link often takes the form of a verb, the web of connections between entities is more like a network than a narrative sequence, the kind of elementary link being highly constrained by the ‘order of worth’. But what does all this imply for human beings?

Since humans hold a unique position in the process of evaluation, at first sight there is radical asymmetry between humans and other beings. This leads to a second asymmetry: as I noted earlier, the foundation for the construction of a common good is always a ‘common humanity’. This feature is common to the different orders of worth, and a common reference point for the sense of justice which sustains them – as is visible when it is challenged by orders of value restricting commonality (as in racism) or extending it (as in certain versions of ecology).

So there is asymmetry between humans and other beings, but closer examination suggests that their joint qualification renders them more similar. Within the régime of justification, the qualification of human being depends on specific ways of engaging objects which are supposed to be beneficial for everyone. Depending so strongly on qualified objects, human beings are themselves *objectified*. This is why worthy people tend to look rigid, ‘conventional’ (in the everyday sense of the term), when they are forced to show their worth, seeming somewhat inhuman when they behave as professional expert, optimising consumer, grandee, or famous star.

Social scientists use dramaturgical vocabularies (theatre, stage, role, play) to capture this rigidity. In doing so, they fail to catch the realist involvement of objects which contribute to the maintenance of qualified beings. They reduce the conventional aspect of qualifications to some kind of stage illusion. But conventions also determine the relevance of evidence in public critique and justification. They offer the articulations of a shared sense of objectivity. In that sense, conventions are not opposed to facts; both form part of the reality test involved in the collective creation of ‘forms of the probable’. Thus, the technically designed road is a prerequisite for exercise of professional worth in driving; appropriate charges on a toll-road are needed if consumer worth is to be performed in buying the right service.

I would like to go one step further and make the following statement: Orders of worth are moral artefacts (one could even call them «political» because of their level of commonality) which bring questions about unjust power into some kind of systematic relationship between human and non human beings, because this relation creates asymmetries of capacities amongst common humanity. This questioning in terms of justice is prepared by the generalisation of some of the ways human beings similarly engage with their ‘equipped environment’. In order to situate and clarify this process of making public a contest about power abuse, we need to explore more bounded or personal ways of engaging things which do not presuppose such an aggrandisement (‘montée en généralité’) of the good. More basic human attachments to the environment, through the

---

19 I shall not here enter into a detailed discussion of competing theories of convention. This notion is at the centre of a recent trend in French socio-economics called the ‘Convention theory’, to which I contribute. Instead of considering conventions as mere collective agreements which bring the convergence of expectancies, whether explicit in contracts, or tacit in customs, I would rather look at conventions as more complex co-ordinating devices which deal with the limits of more localised engagements, when there is a need for third party assessment. A convention is not a broad convergence of shared knowledge. It is nothing more than a limited agreement about selected features people use to control events and entities. What is most important in the convention is not only a rather negative agreement about what is inconvenient, but the common acceptance of what is left aside as irrelevant. This acceptance is grounded on the common knowledge that there is no hope for a more complete alignment (which is assumed in classical group collectives).
accommodation with used and accustomed things and familiar acquaintances, or through normal action with objects, are the grounds for the constitution of more public or civil kinds of political and moral agency. Politics and morals of formal human rights and democratic procedures are built in ignorance of these more basic engagements and evaluations. Therefore, they risk fostering mechanisms of exclusion and domination.

The régime of familiar engagement: a personality distributed on her/his accommodated surroundings (a personal track)

The exploration of a régime of familiarity is needed in order to resist the idea that the basic level of human relation to the world rests on individual and autonomous agency – the kind of agency which is assumed in the attribution of interest, intention and responsibility. By contrast, the sort of human agency which is involved in familiar engagements with a world of proximity depends on numerous idiosyncratic linkages with a customised environment. The familiar handling of used things departs from normal functions or conventional prescriptions. Such dynamics of engagement have nothing to do with conventional forms of judgement or the subject object divisions implied by normal planned action. They have instead to do with perceptual and kinaesthetic clues about familiar and customised ‘paths’ through local environments which involve modifying the surroundings as well as the habits of the human body. Personalised and localised usage composes a habitat as much as it constitutes a personality. Let’s call ‘personality’ the kind of agency which is made out of all these accommodations with familiar beings. Such agency is distributed widely through a person’s surroundings. The kind of good which governs this cautious handling of human characters and specified things is not the fulfilment of planned normal action but rather has to do with taking good care of this accommodation. The proper language to offer accounts of what happens in far from the formal statements offering justifications. It is highly indexical and gestural (Bréviglieri 1997).

The difference between a path and a conventional road appropriately illustrates this mode of engagement between a personalised being and his/her familiar surrounding. A shepherd from the Vallée d’Aspe raises such a familiar engagement and the kind of path and cautious human agency which goes with it, against the plan to build a functional road up to the pastures, although the right to use this road is planned to be restricted to shepherds. The phrase ‘path-dependency’ designates, as a general category, a kind of creative learning which is marked by strong dependence on specific historical conditions and circumstances. The path is a configuration with neither a strong individual intentional nor objective instrumental agency, a primitive figure for familiar commerce with the surroundings. Neither designed nor planned as a functional instrument, the path emerges as non-intentional result of the acquaintance of human beings with a milieu of human and non human beings. This path is created through habitual frequenting as much as physical topography. Indeed it may simply reflect a pattern of wandering and go nowhere, like a sheep track: if you treat it as a material support to achieve a goal you are likely to end in a cul-de-sac.

The wandering path is Heidegger’s favourite one when he seeks to relativise the subjective being (1962). Sartre, inspired by a phenomenological lineage leading to Merleau-Ponty, tries to capture the notion of familiarity by talking of ‘entour’, in the sense of close surroundings. But he stays within the vocabulary of intentional action and ‘project’ when he considers failures, although they should bring to light the dynamics of the régime. When Sartre talks of the ‘unexpected phenomenon’ which stops his ‘project’ of riding on his bike to the next town he attributes the failure to commonly identified objects: a punctured tire, the fact that the sun is too hot or the wind blows in his face (Sartre 1956 [1943]). But if I fall while riding on a familiar path, it is difficult to point a finger and blame the irregularity of the road, the wear and tear on the bike, or even a lack of technical competence.
This régime of familiarity is not an archaic way of engaging with the world. Any driver or pedestrian familiar with a modern road ‘customises’ it in ways that may have nothing to do with the normal action of transportation – and any part of the environment, even highly technical, may be treated in the same way. In such highly localised and diffused familiar arrangements, one cannot attribute failures to specific items, for responsibility is itself widely distributed across the personalities and their personalised surrounding (Thévenot 1994a).

The régime of regular planned action: intentional human agency and functional objects: (the road as a means to an end)

On the other hand, a road may be planned and deliberately built. Indeed, a road is paradigmatic case of implementing intentions, a material means for reaching a goal: a ‘road to follow’. Co-ordination between human beings who do not know one another is impossible if each personality follows his or her own path – or uses roads in a completely idiosyncratic manner. Thus roads (like other commonly identified objects) support the complementary functional agency to allow normal action from non personalised individuals. Co-ordination of subjects within a regime of intentional action relies on the separation of subjects and objects in conformity with the classical notion of action. But the capture of objects in a functional format is as much needed as the intentional agency attributed to human beings.

By contrast with the kind of good ‘care’ which governs the régime of familiarity and the conventionalised qualifications which govern the régime of justification, adjustment within regimes of intentional action has to do with successfully achieving regular action. The basic structure of language with its casual grammar of subjects, verbs of action and objects is appropriate for accounts in this régime. It exhibits the broad tolerance about the way in which they are defined. A road is a tool for going from one place to another. That is the end of the story. But what happens if shepherds use the highway for their cattle? Or tourists use off-road vehicles on unpaved roads intended only for shepherds to go to their mountain pastures and so to limit the impact on wildlife? When the arguments start, the toleration found within the regime of intentional action is no longer acceptable. The issue has to be settled by talking of conventional qualification and shifts into the régime of justification.

While the familiarity régime fails to attribute responsibility, the régime of regular planned action sustains the individual intentional agency which is needed for this attribution. The figure of a subject who supports projects and contracts is presupposed by contemporary management and welfare policies. But how are intentions imputed? How are planned actions identified? The answer is – partly in material form.

Examples abound, but this is particularly clear in psychiatry where, if intentions are unclear they can sometimes be attributed by detecting regular paths or movements. For instance, in autism observers find it difficult to attribute intentions to the patient. Therapist Fernand Deligny developed a method using graphs rather than language to capture the erratic but ‘customised’ wanderings of those who are autistic. In one of the institutions influenced by Deligny, therapists departed from this recording of idiosyncratic paths and tried to capture the activities of persons who suffer autism in the format of regular planned action. In their view, this was needed to co-ordinate and monitor the interaction of sufferers with non-autistic people (Barthélémy 1990). The idea was to make patterns of regular action and therefore intentions explicit by placing regular tools for different

20 I studied this problem on a more consequential domain. I compared organisations that deliberately encourage this familiarity regime in their management, to others where the workplace is, by contrast, arranged in order to facilitate a justification regime and the imputation of failures either to human or non human qualified beings (Thévenot 1996c).
actions (picking up food, or washing dishes) in separate areas. The visibility of the movements between these areas and the distant instruments meant that it possible to impute functional and intentional agency – and so to treat those with autism through their attachments to context.

CONCLUSION: WHAT KIND OF MORAL COMPLEXITY?

I have introduced a diversity of basic human agencies and ways of engaging with the world by focusing on the variation in one kind of material environment: roads. Drawing upon the same empirical corpus, I could have introduced more complicated sequential moves involving, for instance, composite strategic plans. John Law has clarified the way in which material forms support strategies and make possible the «storage» of power (Law 1991b). The understanding of this material support of human agency modifies our idea of power and the critical appraisal of power abuse. The classical example which brings us back to transportation devices is the Long Island Parkway which Langdon Winner uses to illustrate the «politics of artefacts»: a low bridge discourages the public transit of black and poor people (Winner 1980). In the case I have looked at here we find a road which apparently meets a «green qualification» but which can also be denounced as hiding a strategic plan which eventually will disregard this qualification. The road has three lanes and therefore escapes the critical four-lanes denounced as a high traffic or «truck» highway. In addition, it is bordered by a bicycle path on each side. However, opponents argue that within this apparently «green» road a strategic plan to enlarge it will be easy to carry out because of the existence of the two bicycle paths.

But how precisely does this attention paid to the material environment of human agency modify our perspective on issues to do with morality? Bruno Latour has identified how technical objects compensate for the moral failings of human beings, and has pointed amusingly to the way moral rules are «inscribed» in safety belts or hotel key-rings (Latour 1993a, 1993b). What difference does such inscription make? Will a symmetrical treatment of human and non-human beings, and the conception of their relationship as a network, lead us to get rid of the notion of responsibility, a central category in moral issues? John Law rightly observe that liberal political and moral philosophy proposes a figure of the human being which presupposes a series of assumptions about self-interest, language-use or autonomy with respect to his or her surroundings (Law 1998). Following disabled rights activists who denounce discriminatory environments, Law notes that «many, perhaps most, disabled people are substantially disenfranchised in liberal democracies». Technical equipment installed in a portable computer and mounted on a wheelchair might «render them autonomous in certain important respects, and thereby allows them to exercise discretion.» Does this mean that this individual and autonomous agency is the only way to raise moral issues, as it is assumed in a broad liberal tradition?

The moral questioning of human attachments to nature and artefacts

In this chapter I have offered the outlines of a political and moral sociology which aims to capture the complexity of evaluative ‘formats’. This is a sociology of the ways in which people but also objects, are caught up in evaluations through their joint involvement in different kinds of engagements. The identification of the non-human equipment of our human relations strongly alters our view on moral issues although it does not necessarily undermine the centrality of a reference to common humanity. We are not simply led to integrate a material world into forms of moral questioning which are too often restricted to human relations. This is because it is also possible to reverse this program and consider the way in which moral or political categories are built to deal with the attachments of human beings to their natural and artefactual environments. Human beings clearly take advantage of a diversity of modes of attachment in order to enlarge their capacities.
The track is a primitive example of this enlargement, which is not even specific to human beings but also available to other animals. But what is specific to humanity is the way in which these enlargements of capacities confront the basic assumption of a common humanity. The best place to see this confrontation is in the way human beings co-ordinate their behaviour (even in agonistic terms). Amongst human beings, co-ordination rests upon the connection between human behaviour and the orientation towards some kind of good which delimits the relevant reality to be taken into account. This is the way we monitor our own conduct and this is the way we capture that of others’.

But the notions of good which have been elaborated to make sense and reality of human conducts are quite diverse, depending on the way attachments to the environment are handled and evaluated. My argument has been that the ‘the good’ and ‘the real’ are linked together in a variety of different ways within what I have called pragmatic régimes of engagement. The argument is: that people – but also things – are evaluated through their involvement in different modes of activity; and that evaluation and the realist conditions for an effective engagement with the world necessarily go together. The analysis that I have developed in this chapter has a number of implications. One is that notions of agency, action and practice need to be re-examined within the context of these different pragmatic regimes: different régimes imply very different notions of activity. A second, as I have just noted, is that the access to, and capture of, the world – the realist condition of activity – depend on the delineation of some kind of good. The distinction between realism and evaluation is much tighter than is commonly imagined in the social sciences. A third is that objects and people are caught up and evaluated – i.e. «engaged» -- in a world of multiple régimes.

What kind of complexity?

So what kind of complexity of the good and the reality which are jointly engaged does this framework highlight? First, I want to insist upon a sort of ‘vertical’ complexity. At the basic level, within the régime of familiar engagement, the scope of evaluation is quite local. A local good governs proximate accommodation with circumstances and the environment, and does not involve individual and autonomous agency at all. However, this localised and personalised shaping of attachment does not lie outside moral and political questioning. Familiar engagements sustain the reality and the good of personal usages. They constitute a habitat, a home, which supports the capacity of a human personality. The language of rights usually presupposes a more generalised and detached figure of individual agency which corresponds to the régime of planned action. But this upper level collapses if it is not built upon the prior maintenance of a personality. The claim for a fundamental right to housing points to this priority but, again, one should realise that the artefacts of law are usually erected at the level of individual agency and largely ignore the prerequisite of this agency. When law integrates more familiar engagements, it presupposes their transformation into collectivised «customs». In the régime of planned action, which has to do with successfully achieving regular action, some other definition of ‘the good’ is involved which is linked both to the human agency of a subject intending a project, and to the objective separation of objects which are captured through their function, i.e. their capacity to support the project. No more erring tracks and paths, no more personalities, but regular roads for regular transport and the separation of human individual and autonomous subjects.

In the régime of justification, the confrontation between enabling attachments to the environment and common humanity is more demanding in terms of the common dignity of human beings. Actually, the enlargement of the scope of the evaluation results from the fact that certain modes of attachment have been widely generalised and offer the possibility of equivalence. This is typically induced by standard artefacts or new standard links with things (in terms of information exchange, for example). Equivalence opens up the possibility of measuring unequal capacities and creates a tension with an orientation towards equal human dignity. It raises issues of injustice and
power abuse. Evaluations in terms of legitimate orders of worth have been specifically elaborated to deal with this tension. Different orders of worth are ways in which the furnishing of the world is integrated with common humanity. Each mode of integration links human and other beings in its own specific way—and each implies a specific form of human ability or capacity which may be unequally distributed. Thus the bond generalised in private ownership and the sale of goods is not like that based on habit and precedent which guarantees trust. And the two differ from bonds which rest on visibility and the common identification of signs, or from the chains through which living creatures depend on one another. «Green» critiques or justifications are not new insofar as they integrate non human beings into evaluations, but rather because they rest on a different kind of generalised linkage. Each of these orders of worth which govern critiques and justifications shapes its own way in which humans and human dignity are properly linked to and dependent on natural or artificial objects—in what we might think of as a ‘compound humanity’.

The plurality of orders of worth introduces another sort of ‘horizontal’ complexity, one which I have studied with Luc Boltanski. Each of the general justifications—and I have mentioned a number of these including the industrial, the market, the civic and the domestic—has its own measure of ‘the good’, its own general order of worth. Since there are a number of different orders of justification, the people and the objects which they discover or presuppose are also caught up in compromise: thus the road which I discussed above embeds and pre-supposes not one but several such justifications or versions of the good. Responding to the reproach that we ignore the fact that «impure» arrangements are more powerful than «pure» ones (Law 1991b, p.173; Law and Mol 1995, p.285), I would say that coherent qualification is required in the movement of critique, while compromises are constantly arranged to organise complexity.

Which approach to responsibility?

The attribution of responsibility takes place in such a movement of critique. Therefore, it requires the delineation of a kind of good. At the level of familiar acquaintance, the careful attention to being attuned to one’s surroundings does not allow a strict allocation of capacities and responsibilities—in the classical sense—among human or other entities. Careless handling is not necessarily the result of deliberate intention; it ordinarily results from the lack of accommodation with the peculiarities of a particular human and non-human environment. At the other end, the construction of moral beings through the qualifications and moral artefacts of the regime of justification means that it is possible to ascribe responsibility and achieve general agreement in ways compatible with an idea of a common humanity. This is not the case for the regime of planned action, which is mainly designed to detach human agents from objects in their environment and treat each of them as the proper source of responsibility for failure. The difference means that morality crafted in terms of worthiness is quite different from the individual agency of autonomous actors presupposed in most studies.

From these variations of the notion of responsibility, one can see that the identification of regimes of engagement does not contribute to the relativisation of the notion, nor to its distribution among a network of connected entities. The idea is rather to differentiate between the ways human attachments to the environment are submitted to critical evaluation, without being limited by a simply dichotomy between public and private.

21 This development aims at answering Bruno Latour’s inquisitive question about a possible emerging seventh order of worth, “green worth” (Lafaye et Thévenot 1993, Latour 1995); for more on this issue, see Thévenot 1996a.

22 Such compromises constitute the skeleton of organisations (Thévenot 1989). Stark developed an approach of complex organisations based on the ability to combine evaluative principles, to manage a “portfolio of justifications” and produce multiple accounting (1996).
Having said this, let me end with a story. It is a story which reveals the complex ways in which people shift between different pragmatic regimes and moral treatments of their attachments to the world.

Jean Labarère is a shepherd. He is not the Biblical shepherd who ‘Maketh me to lie down in green pastures’, ‘leadeth me beside the still waters’, and ‘restoreth my soul’. (Psalm 23). Neither, like the ancient shepherd, does he set the wilderness against the civilisation of the city. Instead he is a contemporary shepherd with complex relations to nature. Although he lives for much of the year in the wilderness and is one of the few people who might actually meet a Pyrenean bear, the way he lives is also technological – indeed one might say technicised. In the high pastures where he lives with his flock for several months a year and produces cheese, his home is a rather comfortable cabin with modern domestic appliances and a solar powered radio-telephone. Indeed, some of his equipment and his food arrives not by traditional mules climbing on steep trails but by air, by helicopter.

What kind of bizarre hybrid shepherd is he? And here is the paradox – for he has all his state-of-the-art equipment because of those archaic and non-human creatures, the bears. He is funded and sponsored by an voluntary association, FIEP, whose charter seeks to promote harmonious ‘cohabitation’ and ‘let shepherds and bears live together in the Pyrenees.’ Pyrenean bears, the ‘last of their kind’, are ‘endangered by new roads’. Helicopters and radio-telephones spare the construction of roads. The justification or the test is that of green worth: as member of the association puts it, ‘the bear is an integrator. We cannot care for bears without taking care of the forest and the pastures, for the bears are demanding. They are very demanding about the quality of their habitat. If you want to protect bears then you always have to care for the whole mountain environment.’ The aim is avoid both a ‘human reservation – like an Indian reserve’ – and a zoo for bears.

But Jean Labarère is something more, for he is also inspired by nature. He is shepherd-poet celebrating the mountains, ‘stone giants, clothed in red, who, since eternity, have looked at one another as if a couple in love.’ And he has also written a poem to honour his sheepdog. In this poem he extends the moral vocabulary of selfless love – the regime of agapè described by Luc Boltanski (1990) – to domesticated animals. For the poem tells a true story about the legendary stray sheep, a ‘foolhardy’ ewe’ who left the paths of the flock and moved towards the steep precipice. But the dog was watching and quickly joined the sheep:

‘Mes que cadon tots dus, era aulha e eth can.
Qu’enteno eth tuquet trebucar ua lia,
Eth men can que hamà, eth son darrèr hamet.
Tà deth qu’èra eth son darrèr dia,
Que pensarèi a tu qu’èras un bon canhet.
Si ès partit aciu haut rejuénher quauqua estela,
Que sèi qu’averàs causit «l’Etoile du Berger».
E s’i as rencontrat aquera praube oelha,
Que l’as de perdonar, tu mon brave canhet.’ (Labarère 1994)

23 The literal translation in English is the following:
‘They both fell down.
I heard the sheep bell hit the stones.
My dog gave his last bark.'
My dear dog, I will think of you.  
If you have gone on high, and reached some star  
I know you would have chosen the ‘shepherd star’  
[in French, in the text, the ‘evening star’ is called the ‘shepherd star’]  
And if you met this poor sheep there,  
then you’ll forgive her,  
My brave little dog.’
Bibliography


Labarère, J., 1994, Poète et berger, Association Los Caminaires.


Latour, B., 1993b, "Le fardeau moral d'un porte-clefs", in La clé de Berlin et autres leçons d'un


Locke, John, 1966 [1690], The second treatise of government (An essay concerning the true original, extent and end of civil government), and, A letter concerning toleration, Oxford, Blackwell (edited, with a revised introduction by J. W. Gough).


Pufendorf, S., 1771, Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens, ou Système général des Principes les plus importants de la Morale, de la Jurisprudence et de la Politique, Leyde (traduction de J. Barbeyrac; édition originale en latin: 1672).


Sartre, Jean Paul, 1956 [1943], Being and nothingness; an essay on phenomenological ontology, New York, Philosophical Library (translated and with an introd. by Hazel E. Barnes).


