

Power, Norms and Social Sanction: Identifying “Practical Norms” in Global Politics

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Summary

This paper intends to criticize the use of the concept of “norm” in many constructivist works in International Relations, with the example of Neta Crawford’s *Argument and Change in World Politics* (2002). Referring to Anthony Giddens and Nicholas G. Onuf, it proposes the concept of “practical norm” linked with the notions of social sanction and institutional resources. This concept articulates three dimensions of norms: 1. Norms are collective expectations that do not need to be verbally formulated and rationalised; 2. these practical collective expectations exist as long as they are socially sanctioned, but these social sanctions do not need to be constantly supported by ideas of what is ‘good’ or ‘just’, by ethical beliefs; 3. these social sanctions affect the resources of political actors as they concern the reproduction (positive sanction) or the disappearance (negative sanction) of others’ behaviours.

The notion of ‘norm’ embodies a large part of the discrepancy existing between rationalist and constructivist approaches in International Relations. Construed as an *idea*, and more precisely an idea of what is good, a logically-elaborated ethics, the norm is refuted by rationalist scholars who argue that it is of no use for the understanding of political behaviours on the ground that ideas, however compelling, can hardly compete with *objective* interests, above all *material* ones, in international politics (Moravcsik, 2000: 219-25; Snyder, 2002: 7-9). A frequent constructivist response consists in integrating strategic calculations and interests in larger ideational, and more particularly normative, frames. In other words, interests are inseparable from normative features (Adler, 2002: 103¹). Thus, the understanding of any political behaviour, even the most “power-maximizing” one, requires a reference to the norms that underlie the interests identified by its author.

But what is that generates norms? Most constructivist research deepens the ideational roots of particular norms, analysing the discursively-formulated ethics of their author and even retracing the genealogy of their social constitution (Laffey and Weldes, 1997: 200-1). But an alternative approach, although under-theorised in International Relations, lies in the notion of “practical rationality”, which takes the following sociological warning

seriously: social knowledge does not only consist in discursively-formulated intellectual constructions, including ethical ones, but it also encompasses all knowledge that is mobilised by individuals in their everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1971). Most of this knowledge does not need be verbally expressed in the agents' minds to be operational, to be *practically* available in the course of action. In Anthony Giddens' words, this knowledge operates in the *practical consciousness* of the individuals only during the time of the action, whereas ideas expressed with words in their minds reside in their *discursive consciousness* (Giddens, 1984).

The present article analyses the notion of 'practical norm' as an important tool for the analysis of the normative foundations of power in general and political behaviours within the international scene in particular. To do so, it discusses those constructivist analyses of political change in the International Relations discipline which acknowledge a high value to arguments, argumentation and communicative rationality. Although these analyses opportunely stress the potentiality of argumentation and persuasion (Risse, 2000), they miss the many cognitive and normative processes whereby power is wielded.

Neta Crawford's remarkable work on *Argument and Change in World Politics* is valuable material for my present discussion, given the many epistemological convergences with her work. I intend to show, however, that her analysis of normative change underestimates the ability of social agents to learn about others' expectations and to internalise new norms without having them heard or expressed completely.

Crawford champions ethical arguments as a formidable avenue for favouring political change. I actually do not contest this as a logical possibility which may inspire relevant empirical hypotheses. However, my questioning on ethical arguments works precisely the other way round: how come ethical arguments so often fail to change existing practices after they have been expressed, sometimes even widely broadcasted? Is there something else in behavioural norms than coherently connected normative beliefs inspiring verbally-rationalised prescriptions that guide behaviour?

This opposite perspective leads me to wonder whether Neta Crawford is not overestimating the occurrence of this logical possibility in political experience, and, if this is the case, what brings her to this overestimation. Although, quite understandably, this overestimation cannot be established empirically, the present inquiry intends to look for the possible epistemological and methodological assumptions underlying her analysis of norms which allow this overestimation.

My answer is that Neta Crawford's core assumptions lead her to overlook the existence of many behavioural norms which are not verbally-rationalised and are nonetheless identified and reproduced in a *practical* way, that is, without argumentative process or ethical persuasion. Using Anthony Giddens (1984) and Nicholas Onuf (1989, 1998a, b), I insist on the fact that the social reproduction of norms proceeds through the observation of regularities in others' practices. These regularities generate collective expectations, and norms are nothing but collective expectations shared by the members of a group, even if they never are verbally expressed and defined as "norms" by those who follow them.

The absence of verbal formulation makes it impossible to figure out the normative dimension of this social knowledge, and thus to question its ethical foundation through a systematic, rational argumentation within the group. Even when a norm is verbally identified and formulated as such, allowing an ethical assessment through argumentative efforts, many other norms may remain in a practical form – that is, out of reach for arguments – thus limiting the scope of the ethical assessment of the "discovered" norm. And yet, they still are norms.

As a result, my analysis helps to understand the complete disconnection that may exist between many behavioural (practical) norms and acknowledged ethical beliefs and principles. Of course, someone may observe such disconnection concerning one specific norm and succeed in engendering an ethical argumentation about it someday. But this may take a long time or even never happen. In the meantime, this logical and ethical disconnection will provide social actors with some room for actions.

Moreover, the great political value of behavioural practical norms is that they are permanently and pervasively protected from verbal rationalisation and ethical assessment by social agents themselves. Why this protection? Because, for every individual, following these norms is often an urgent matter which does not allow a reflexive verbal questioning on them. Why such an urgency? Because the identities, roles and social power of individuals are linked to their compliance to these norms in their everyday practices; any hesitation in the enactment of the expected practices engenders the risk of a *negative social sanction* from the other members of the groups which define an individual's identities (his/her belonging to these groups), roles (his/her social positions within the groups), and the social resources attached to them.

There is that needs to be analysed prior to the discursive formulation of rational arguments, their ethical assessment and their confrontation to one another. It is this story and its political significance I aim at reporting here, using the concept of "practical norm".

First, to do so, I contest the tendency in the constructivist IR literature to understand norms as verbally-formulated ideas founded on logically-elaborated ethical grounds. Second, I use the notion of "practical rationality" in order to show that, on the contrary, norms are collective expectations engendered by the reproduction of practices, and that they do not require a verbal formulation and a rationalisation of ethically-grounded beliefs. Although they can be identified as norms, and they sometimes are, they necessarily exist in a practical form before any possible verbal formulation; otherwise, they would be normative *ideas* and *beliefs*, not norms. Third, I insist that these collective expectations remain a social phenomenon despite their practical dimension: they do not exist by accident; they are identified and reproduced by the members of a group according to the social sanctions that necessarily accompany them, with no verbal prescription for these sanctions. Social sanction constitutes a sociological criterion for identifying the proper normative nature of these collective expectations. Finally, I stress the sensitiveness of political leaders to the many diverse practical norms that surround

them: the social sanctions associated with these norms affect the leaders' resources since they concern the reproduction (positive sanction) or the disappearance (negative one) of others' behaviours which are indispensable for the reproduction of their own social power.

1. Norms According to Neta Crawford: Verbal Rationalisation and Ethical Foundation

Neta Crawford distinguishes two meanings of the term of "norms": 1/ "*normative beliefs*" and 2/ "*behavioural norms*" or simply "*norms*". The first ones are "*ideas individuals and groups hold about how they ought to act (or not act) to do what is 'right' or expected. They are prescriptions with justifications attached to them.*" The second ones "*describe the dominant practice or behaviour*". In that other sense, behavioural norms "*create expectations about how actors will behave in certain situations*". Even if a practice is not universally adhered to, it must be considered a norm "*if the behaviour is commonly expected, and if, when actors do not follow the expected behaviour, sanctions are considered and/or applied against those who violate the norm.*" (Crawford: 40-1).

Crawford's definition of normative belief points out a verbally-expressed "prescription" in individuals' minds about how things "ought to be" according to a particular idea of good, of what is right. As her work concerns chiefly ethical arguments, she will grant a high value to normative beliefs, since ethical arguments "*are characterized by the use of prescriptive statements that rest on normative beliefs*" (Crawford: 41)². A normative belief is thus an idea, a verbally-formulated idea, about what ought to be.

Consider now what Crawford calls "behavioural norms", as opposed to normative beliefs. According to her definition, when I say that a particular group of individuals abides by a particular norm, I mean that these individuals reproduce a particular behaviour in a particular situation because they know this behaviour is expected by the group and that contravening this expectation would expose them to collective (negative) sanctions from the group.

I understand and use the term “norm” in this latter meaning. In my sense, the notion of “expectation” is fundamental in defining norms, as many scholars put it, following Talcott Parsons (Hurrell, 2002: 143; Katzenstein³, 1996: 5). When people meet for the first time, they may come with expectations about the behaviour of the others, and with various degrees of confidence that their own expectations will be met, between the certainty and the uncertainty, between a high or low probability. Some of these expectations may *happen* to be shared by all of them, others by some of them, and with different degrees of assurance, etc., according to their previous socialisation. But in the course of their repeated interactions, the observation of everyone’s behaviours and reactions will entail some adjustments among each one’s expectations.

How can one explain these adjustments which engender actual collectively-shared expectations, that is, norms? How do they emerge?

Here appear the core assumptions of Crawford’s analysis. First, inconspicuously, she adds to her definition of behavioural norms that they are “*identified by wide compliance and are usually justified with normative beliefs [...]*” (Crawford, 41). This sentence suggests that individuals clearly know the norms they are following, and “*usually*” relate these norms with shared normative beliefs.

However, if one returns to her initial definition focused on collective expectations and sanctions, one finds there is no logical necessity for such a “usual” justification with normative beliefs or ideas of good. As long as the expectations *are there* within the group and are associated with sanctions, they will be reproduced. This absence of logical necessity may explain the term “usually” Crawford added in the latter quote.

Nevertheless, her work reveals some discomfort with this lack of logical necessity. As in every intellectual construction built on causal relations, there must be an origin, a foundation, explaining the emergence of behavioural norms, and normative beliefs appear as an ideal and logical candidate to play this role. And more practically, it seems hard to

believe that a group of individuals may know the norms they are following and reproducing without founding them on a vague notion of what is good or just⁴. These assumptions never appear so clearly than when she intends to explain the absence of ethical foundation:

Both behavioural norms and normative beliefs usually have a traceable history; actors will often be able to say when and sometimes why they or their ancestors began a practice and why they thought a normative belief was right. But behavioural norms may also be arbitrary. In other words, there may be no good ethical or practical reasons for a behavioural norm, yet, for some accidental reason, the practice is accepted and expected. (Crawford, 2002: 88)

The terms “*arbitrary*” and “*accidental*” reveal the intellectual aberration Crawford sees in this lack of ethical foundation, even suggesting this shall remain an exception. In the same vein, she considers farther that “[v]iolations of behavioural norms that are strongly linked to normative beliefs are probably more likely to be sanctioned than those with weak or non-existent links to normative beliefs” (ibid: 92).

The assumption of the anteriority of normative beliefs⁵ matches many other constructivist analyses of norms in IR. In their study of the “life-cycle” of norms, for instance, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998: 895; quoted in Crawford, 2002: 97) cannot envisage any process of diffusion of norms other than an initial explicit effort by “norm entrepreneurs” to persuade via arguments others to embrace a promoted norm (in the sense of a verbally-formulated prescription). This process brings about a wider “acceptance” of the promoted norm in a “cascade” form. The last stage, they argue, is that of the “internalisation” of the norm when it “*acquire[s] a taken-for-granted quality and [is] no longer a matter of broad public debate*”. The deliberative nature accorded by Finnemore and Sikkink in their analysis of this process of diffusion of norms, understood as verbally-expressed prescriptions, resonates with Crawford’s assumption on the anteriority of normative beliefs and, thus, the capacity for ethical arguments to re-shape normative beliefs and, consequently, to change behavioural norms.

Indeed, a large part of Crawford's argument concerns how ethical arguments can be used for changing dominant practices and normative beliefs. *Normal* practices remain unquestioned by definition, so ethical reasoning may serve as a useful source of questioning, and of alternatives. According to her, this can bring to a "*denormalization*" and finally a "*delegitimation*" of these practices and of their authors, and result in individuals changing their conceptions of what is possible and desirable, and even their definition of their interests. This "*deconstruction*" would "*create a moral space, an opening*" for the institutionalization of new normative beliefs, through their derivation in "*rules, laws, regulations, standards operating procedures, or other kinds of expected practices within institutions*" (Crawford, 2002: 101-5). Here again, normative beliefs do precede rules and norms, and inspire them.

Her confidence in ethical arguments brings her sometimes close to a circular reasoning: "[...] *when they are successful, ethical arguments work primarily because of their persuasive power and the source of this persuasive power is their content*" (ibid: 85). By definition, an argument is successful because of its persuasive power. But how can one be sure that ideas of good (normative beliefs) carried by an ethical argument are actually the source of this persuasion? For instance, what if this argument, whatever its ethical content, just succeeded because it provoked fear or lust in hearers' minds? And even, how can one be sure that this argument has actually persuaded those it is supposed to have? Is observing new practices after the diffusion of this argument enough, particularly when it concerns many people over a long period of time? As Crawford opportunely acknowledges farther, "*that ethical arguments occur everywhere, all the time, does not mean that they are necessarily significant causally. Arguments could be 'merely' rationalisation or post-hoc justification.*" (ibid: 119, 126).

Therefore, serious methodological and epistemological difficulties rise. Even the empirical tests she cautiously conceives for methodological purpose attest to the existing difficulties rather than overcoming these difficulties⁶ (ibid: 122-5). If a durable change in the verbal public references used by governing groups may actually denote a change of standards and normative beliefs expected by some parts of the governed, as she asserts

(ibid: 33-5), retracing this ‘textual’ change does not tell how it occurred, under which conditions and incentives. Worse, this does not allow for a correct assessment of how deep the change in the behaviours of the governing group is. What if some ethically-reproved practices just moved from one place to another, from one group of persons towards another, just hidden by new names and new ethical references?

I aim at pointing out the limits of argumentation, as the arguments used by the agents – including normative ideas and principles – do not perfectly cover the real collective expectations in presence, the normative environment of those arguing, and their motivations to use one argument or another. Norms do not exist *practically* within a group if the behaviours they call upon are not actually expected by a large part of the members of the group – whatever they would say about these practices.

2. Norms as Collective *Practical* Expectations

I claim that the identification of, and the compliance with, collective expectations (that is, behavioural norms, or simply norms, in my sense) occur mostly without the verbal expression of these expectations. First, all the practices whereby a member of a group internalises the norms of the group are not verbal practices – they encompass many actions or physical expressions and appearances. But even when they are, and they often are, they never represent the clear and complete statement of one’s expectations and interpretative schemes. These practices are necessarily interpreted in reference to supposed intentions, motivations and expectations, and these permanent interpretative efforts consist in identifying *social rules* (Giddens, 1984: 2-3).

In that sense, I completely agree with Neta Crawford (2002: 121) when she notes that “[b]y *intending, implicating, presupposing, and entailing, speakers convey far more than they say. Efforts to analyze the contents of political talk that restrict themselves to surface utterances are thus likely to miss much of the politically relevant content.*” But she should even consider the possibility that the speakers would not be able to list all the norms which are supporting their intending, implicating, presupposing and entailing underneath.

In my sense, many of these norms are mobilised by the speakers in a *practical* way, that is, without verbally rationalising that these words or those arguments will meet the expectations of the audience and gain the endorsement of the audience.

The constructivist premise states that any repetitive social interaction generates institutionalisation, that is, collective interpretations through shared “*interpretative schemes*”, as “*modes of typification incorporated within actors stocks of knowledge, applied reflexively in the sustaining of communication*” (Giddens, 1984: 29). A collective interpretative scheme exists when it emerges in someone’s mind and makes her/him change some of her/him social practices, and when others who witness these changing practices progressively interpret them in reference to this very mental scheme and assimilate it in their own social interactions. Through these repeated practices and their interpretation, this scheme ‘enters’ the minds of the interactants and is institutionalised as an objective reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Douglas, 1986; March and Olsen, 1989).

According to Giddens (1984: 21-2), the enactment and the reproduction of practices require the knowledge of “*rules*”, that is, “*techniques or generalizable procedures*”, “*typified schemes (formulae)*” that individuals employ “*in the course of their daily activities to negotiate routinely the situations of social life*”. But at the same time, these rules are diffused through the repeated observation of practices within the interaction. In accordance with Giddens’ focus on “*routinization*” (ibid: xxiii, 18-9), Nicholas Onuf (1989: 45) recalls the importance of “*conventions*” and “*custom*” in Wittgenstein’s perspective, as well as the “*conventionality of human society*” and “*of human nature itself*”. This makes Onuf conclude: “*regularities are the key*” (ibid: 110).

Thus, repeated interactions strengthen the expectations shared by the interactants. But, against the deterministic bias, it must be noted that this is far from covering all possible behaviours⁷. Room for innovation resides in the different degree of ‘normalisation’ among all possible practices and in the ambivalence social agents consequently can confer on their own practices. In order to follow the social norms of a group, one needs to

identify at a particular moment the more certain and shared expectations concerning one's behaviours in a particular situation and to enact the behaviours that will *very probably* be interpreted as matching up these expectations. But this probability depends on how deep other members scrutinize these behaviours in order to assess their conformity, as previous experiences in similar situations showed.

Therefore, a norm exists within a group when almost all its members *really* expect this behaviour in a particular situation. Now, how do individuals know what is actually expected in a particular social space at a particular moment?

Here intervenes the notion of practical rationality. According to Giddens (1984: 3-7), the perceptions of expectations, the assessments of probability and the quests for conformity operate through the "*reflexive monitoring of action*" by the social agents. This competence functions mainly in a *practical* way, without any verbally-rationalised intention of using it⁸. It resides in what Giddens calls the "*practical consciousness*", opposed to the "*discursive consciousness*" (ibid). This practical consciousness is fixed in the human perception process: "*Perception is organized via anticipatory schemata whereby the individual anticipates new incoming information while simultaneously mentally digesting old*" (ibid: 46). These schemata constitute "*a medium whereby the past influences the future*" (ibid).

Important in this regard are the "*psychological mechanisms of recall*", as "*the means of recapitulating past experiences in such a way as to focus them upon the continuity of action. [...] Discursive consciousness connotes those forms of recall which the actor is able to express verbally. Practical consciousness involves recall to which the agent has access in the durée of action without being able to express what he or she thereby 'knows'*" (ibid: 49). Thus, "*what agents know about what they do, and why they do it – their knowledgeability as agents – is largely carried in practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression*" (ibid: xxiii).

These anticipatory schemata include the behaviours of the other members of the group. They do not need to formalise in a discursive way the whole practices they expect from others and the degree of certainty they grant these expectations before the interaction. As long as these practices are enacted, people will not even be discursively aware they were expecting them.

But their reflexive questioning others' expectations and intentions will commence if these practically-expected practices do not occur. As Giddens (ibid: 6) adds farther, "*questions often posed about intentions and reasons by philosophers are normally only put lay by actors either when some piece of conduct is specifically puzzling or when there is a 'lapse' or fracture in competency which might in fact be an intended one. [...] Such questions are normally posed, of course, only if the activity concerned is in some way puzzling – if it appears either to flout convention or to depart from the habitual modes of conduct of a particular person*" (ibid: 281).

It is worth noting that Neta Crawford (2002, 15, quoting Robert Aud, 1989) does use the notion of "practical reasoning", understood as an "*internal act of deliberation that individuals can use to work through problems*", as a "*route to discovery*". More precisely, practical reasoning is characterised as "*a sequence of practical inferences linked by more than one step of inference*" and a practical inference as "*the single step from a set of premises to a conclusion*" (ibid: 17, quoting here Douglas N. Walton). In every practical inference, Crawford identifies two premises leading to a conclusion: the first one is a desired goal or "norm" in the sense of idea of good; the second is a cause-effect argument or representation of the situation (ibid).

Although this may seem close to the notion of practical rationality I want to stress here, my interpretation brings to amend Crawford's analysis in two ways. First, as I repeated it below, I logically find no necessity related to the first premise: why people would need to pursue a desirable goal founded on an expressed notion of good in order to achieve any practical inference in their everyday life? Social practices are mostly made of

conventions, routines, which are nonetheless reflexively controlled in a practical manner. As long as nobody openly raises an objection about the ethical value of this practice, this reproduction or diffusion may go on. I think social life is made of a multitude of ordinary practices corresponding to this situation.

According to Crawford's second premise, on cause-effect beliefs, I completely agree with it and particularly with her subsequent discussion on the importance of horizontal inferences, of reasoning by association, through analogies, metonyms and metaphors, in the everyday life (Crawford, 2002: 17-18). But in Crawford's expression of "cause-effect argument", the term "argument" ignores the possibility of acquiring cause-effect perceptions of the reality without any verbally-rationalised assessment of facts, as it ignores the possibility to innovate by using these beliefs in new situations without a verbally-rationalised calculation driving to this discovery. The same bias appears in Robert Audi's or Douglas N. Walton's works, which inspired Neta Crawford, when they use the previously cited terms of "deliberation" and "reasoning" referring to the practical reasoning.

Thus, Crawford is right to point out the vulnerabilities of this practical reasoning, and particularly the possibility to question "*the desirability of the proposed goal and whether the goal is worth the actions required to achieve it*" (ibid: 17). But two indispensable steps driving to question a particular practice and its ethical justification may never happen in the everyday life: 1. the naming, the verbal designation of this practice as a social, repetitive and collectively-expected practice; and 2. the verbal formulation of the inferences whereby this practice previously appeared completely normal.

Without these steps, no systematic confrontation with ethical arguments and beliefs will occur about this practice. Like Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 48-51), we think it is a typical mistake from scholars to "*mistake the things of logic for the logic of things*"⁹. People do not need an intellectual and ethical foundation for every act they make in the social world in the day-to-day life. This is only required by those who postulate and seek an origin, principles or basic assumptions from which all human behaviours are ultimately

derived¹⁰. Conversely, to understand the social practices, the sociologist “*has to situate [him/herself] within ‘real activity as such’, that is, in the practical relation to the world, the pre-occupied, active presence in the world through which the world imposes its presence, with its urgencies, its things to be done and said, things made to be said, which directly govern words and deeds without ever unfolding as a spectacle.*” (ibid: 52).

In other words, a sociological investigation is required in order to understand how a particular practice in a particular group of people has been verbally-rationalised and then questioned about its normality and its ethical justification. Such a process is by no means automatic and natural, and cannot be taken for granted. Specific social conditions may explain this, with great political significance.

As I mentioned, Giddens’ account of practical consciousness stresses the necessity for individuals to observe a “puzzling” situation, to feel unable to define the appropriate response, before questioning their own practices and the rules they are following. But as long as this puzzling situation has not appeared or new practical inferences achieve to rapidly solve this situation, the normalisation of a practice does not require a preliminary systematic, rational and ethical assessment of it, not to say a public deliberation about it. This is consistent with the constructivist literature, including Neta Crawford’s book, which insists on the importance of perceived ‘inadequacies’ or ‘problems’ before any reflexive questioning process¹¹. But this literature often fails to consider the profound consequences of this, particularly the possibility that the problem may not only arise from a lack of intellectual or ethical coherence.

For now, it is necessary to understand better why individuals do not spend their time questioning the ethical foundation of their practices before reproducing them. Giddens’ analysis of discursive and practical consciousnesses provides with an hypothesis which combines two opposite perspectives Crawford mentions in her work: the coherentist one (one’s beliefs “*are mutually supportive, forming a coherent network*”) and the pragmatic one (beliefs come about and remain because of their utility in social and practical activity, whatever their correspondence to “reality”) (Crawford, 2002: 44, quoting

Richard Rorty and Peter Gardenfors). I suggest that individuals assure the intellectual and ethical coherence in their mind by using their discursive consciousness, which requires time and intellectual effort. But before this, their practical consciousness constantly works at responding to more *urgent problems*.

Let me a metaphor here, that of a climber who is falling down a cliff: his/her practical consciousness will quickly inform the climber what kind of rock or plant or hole may be used as a grip saving his/her life even if he/she never verbally expressed this knowledge of potential useful grips in such situations before. And this will be done according to what the climber experienced in the past and sometimes by imagining new ideas about useful grips inspired by other places or situations. Obviously, there will be no time for a verbally-rationalised logical process inserting coherence among the climber's beliefs here, just a practical one aimed at assuring his/her survival at that precise moment.

Now, what kind of urgency exists in the social life that may mobilise individuals' practical inferences before allowing them using their discursive rationality for questioning their practices and seeking cognitive and normative coherence among them? I assert that practical rationality seeks above all to constantly identify – in a practical manner – the behaviours one needs to adopt in a repeated interaction in order to meet collective main expectations, for this is the best way to avoid “problematic” reactions from others and to make routinized behaviours continue within that particular interaction. For that reason, people's practical consciousness is an efficient “machine” for constantly identifying norms, *practical* norms, that is, the behaviours which are really collectively expected, whatever the origins of these collective expectations and their ethical justifications. This pervasive attention to the reactions from others brings to my second feature of norms: they are socially sanctioned.

3. Norms as Socially-Sanctioned Behaviours

The little attention paid to the social sanction (which can be positive or negative) and how it functions in the study of norms in the IR discipline (for instance, Finnemore,

1996; Hurrell, 2002) is puzzling. Indeed, social sanction constitutes for sociologists and anthropologists a central piece in any normative process, at least since Emile Durkheim.

Giddens recalls that norms and rules have to do with sanctions: “*rules relate on the one hand to the constitution of meaning, and on the other to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct*” (Giddens, 1984: 18). And farther: “*Normative components of interaction always centre upon relations between the rights and obligations ‘expected’ of those participating in a range of interaction contexts. [...] [T]he normative elements of social systems are contingent claims which have to be sustained and ‘made to count’ through the effective mobilization of sanctions in the contexts of actual encounters*” (ibid: 30).

Social sanctions are thus practices oriented towards any individual committed in an interaction. Particularly important in my prospect, negative sanctions are defined as “*constraints deriving from punitive responses on the part of some agents towards others*” (ibid: 176). These responses occur everywhere, at any time: “[...] *it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the strength of informally applied sanctions in respect of a variety of mundane daily practices. Whatever else Garfinkel’s ‘experiments with trust’ might be thought to demonstrate, they do show the extraordinarily compelling force with which apparently minor features of conversational response are invested. [...] They indicate that the prescriptions involved in the structuring of daily interaction are much more fixed and constraining than might appear from the ease with which they are ordinarily followed*” (ibid: 23).

To say that Neta Crawford ignores the role social sanctions play in the existence of norms would be unfair. The notion of sanction immediately appears in her definition of behavioural norms, as noted above. She farther considers “*international sanctions by the majority of the international community to change the behaviour of those who violate the normative prescriptions of those who support such norm violators*” as one of the “*strongest tests of the role of normative belief and ethical argument*” (Crawford, 2002: 123-4). She even stresses the possible consequences of renouncing or even questioning one’s own norms when she intends to understand the resilience of behavioural norms

confronted to new ethical arguments: “[...] *individuals may conform if doing so brings approval and/or there is a clear material benefit to conformity, while non-conformity leads to disapproval or sanction*” (Crawford, 2002: 110). She also notes the importance for someone holding a specific role to “[follow] *the dominant prescription in order to bring affirmation of their own ‘goodness’ as a person in a specific role*” (ibid: 111).

Nonetheless, she draws from it no significant conclusion for her account on the force of ethical argumentation, leaving out the possibility that social sanctions may be enacted without the consideration of any idea or belief of what is good. Because of her core assumptions, the major “*costs*” she notices in changing norms are of cognitive and ethical dimensions, that is, related to the individual renunciation of causal explanations and normative beliefs:

“individuals and groups may be reluctant to alter normative beliefs, as well as behavioural norms which are strongly normative, if doing so requires rethinking an entire complex of related normative, scientific, practical, and identity beliefs which an individual has become convinced are good and sees no other reason to challenge. Resistance to taking on new normative beliefs if they require massive belief revision may also be due perhaps to desire for economy, or a wish for coherence, or because putting many beliefs up to re-evaluation is cognitively difficult or even emotionally painful.” (ibid: 110).

Let me draw the possible individual costs of any ethical enterprise, through the example of a new law. According to Giddens (1984: 23), law is ‘*among the most strongly sanctioned types of social rules and in modern societies have formally prescribed gradations of retribution*’. But this depicts the *potentiality* of laws in modern societies, not the nature of *every* law. In my sense, a law is not a set of norms in itself. It is a normative enterprise, a normative project from political elites using this specific technology of power in order to promote desired behaviours within a particular group. This enterprise only succeeds if powerful or numerous individuals accept to behave in order to positively or negatively sanction others’ compliance with, or violation of, the promoted norm. The compliance of those who are invited to adopt sanctioning behaviours is required in order to make a promoted conduct become a truly-expected practice. This will not occur as long as these persons balked at changing their own

sanctioning practices and prefer to get round the dispositions of the law or defect. In that case, the law would have existed, but without producing its expected normative effects.

Thus, norms do not need the formulation and formalisation which characterises law (Onuf, 1998a: 70). Practical norms cannot be decreed; they emerge through the same cognitive processes whereby individuals know their everyday social reality. And one fundamental feature of these cognitive processes lies in this dimension of social sanction.

How can one's hesitations for changing his/her sanctioning practices be understood? The reason is that, from an individual point of view, every sanctioning practice, every response to another practice, is all the same exposed to the social sanction of the rest of the group. Thus, the one who changes his/her sanctioning practices runs real risks. The step will be easier if this new sanctioning practice has been previously enacted by others without engendering rejection and dangerous negative reactions. From an individual point of view, this process is everything but anodyne, as no-one can be totally certain this normative and cognitive evolution is shared by the diverse groups composing the group, and particularly by their most powerful members.

This is an essential step. As other types of rules, norms are all the same a mean and a result of the interaction which "*function recursively in either of two ways: by constituting meaning or imposing costs on conduct contrary to what their content indicates*" (Onuf, 1989: 63). In my terms, these costs are imposed through negative social sanction. But these sanctions only exist because they are themselves collectively-expected behaviours which are equally exposed to social sanctions. Consequently, norms only exist because they are entrenched in a wider normative structure composed of permanent "sideways sanctions", as Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 108-11) has convincingly asserted¹².

Regarding these risks of negative social sanction, even public statements in favour of this normative and cognitive evolution from representatives and powerful members do not constitute for an individual a sufficient proof which deserves to be relied on blindly. Similarly, only a deep empirical investigation will tell a social scientist about the

normality of a practice, that is, the existence of a behavioural norm requiring this practice. It requires to observe the differences in the immediate reactions of other members of the group whether this practice is enacted or not, and to interpret the potential punitive value of those reactions. The content of positive or negative sanctioning practices is thus to be established empirically in relation with particular groups. It cannot be abstractly deduced out of a specific institutional and cultural context. But it has to do with disrupting the routine and generating new “problems” in other participants’ minds. Indeed, by delaying a specific behaviour towards a person in front of other participants who are expecting it, or by showing signs of discomfort or hesitation in producing it, or by asking more information than usual before acting, or by expressing some unexpected remarks or reproaches or criticism, one (say, *X*) may provoke a new problem, that is, a reflexive questioning process in his/her interlocutor’s mind (say, *Y*) but also in participants’ minds about *X*’s new conduct (“why is *X* behaving this way?”) as well as *Y*’s previous conduct (“what might *Y* have done?”). Before this reflexive process brings *Y* to verbally question the norms in presence and their ethical justifications, it will engender in his/her mind a practical urgency hastening practical inferences aimed at ending this uncomfortable and even dangerous situation. Once the risk is overcome, *Y* will have printed in his/her practical consciousness the path that brought him/her into this situation and the way to behave in order to avoid it in the future, mainly without any verbal formulation of it.

I suggest that this cognitive process marked by a strong feeling of urgency and using mainly the practical consciousness, as in my previous metaphor with the falling climber, is a very frequent one in social life, not only in climbing accidents. When they act in social life, individuals show a great sensitiveness to risks and dangers. What is at stake here is more primal than a logically-elaborated notion of desirable society and environment; it is the protection of their identities and social roles, of their belonging to particular groups in which they have anchored their physical and emotional security. What is at stake is the avoidance of negative social sanction, which may threaten their role within a society and even their belonging to this society, finally altering their means for assuring their social and even physical survival. This urgency helps to understand

why their repetitive actions, their expectations, their norms are not necessarily founded on a logically-elaborated ethics.

Giddens notes the importance of this silent but fundamental fear, of individuals' constant quest for "ontological security" through the protection of their identities and social roles. Indeed, rules and sanctions are narrowly connected with identities, and particularly with roles, that is, positions others recognise to each one in a particular social space, and around which institutionalised practices are organised. A social position supposes the definition of a precise 'identity' within a network of social relations. Such an 'identity' is nothing but a mental category that necessarily ties in with a particular set of sanctions which are appropriate. A social position is then '*a social identity that carries with it a certain range (however diffusely specified) of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity (...) may activate or carry out*' (Giddens, 1984: 83-4). And Giddens adds, about the role: '*The notion of role, as many critics of its profligate use in the social sciences have pointed out, has some conceptual precision only if applied in contexts of social interaction in which the normative rights and obligations associated with a specific identity are relatively clearly formulated*' (ibid: 86).

These rights and obligations lie in others' reactions. Routine practices are those by which a role is reproduced, since their authors signified through them that they are still completely recognising one's role. Consequently, if all interactants do not produce these routinized practices anymore, this person will not be accorded this role anymore. Day-to-day behaviours strengthen or weaken one's social positions in a particular group. Even one's belonging to this group, that is, one's identity as a member of it, can be affected and finally lost, provoking a particular existential anxiety: "*Ordinary day-to-day life – in greater or less degree according to context and the vagaries of individual personality – involves an ontological security expressing an autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines*" (ibid: 50, quoting Erik Erikson). Nicholas Onuf (1998a: 64) also notes that people are aware of their interest in fostering their identities. This hypothesis has inspired various analyses in the International Relations discipline, like William

Bloom (1990, referring to Freud, George Mead, Erik Erikson, Parsons or Habermas), or Alexander Wendt (1999: 122-124, referring to Giddens precisely).

This consideration of the risk of exclusion from a social space reminds the importance of day-to-day sanctioning practices for the protection of one's identities and roles. Individuals primarily try, through their practical consciousness, to preserve their roles and identities by preserving the routinized practices others enact towards them¹³. In turn, this preservation implies to enact and reproduce the practices others are expecting from them. In that sense, when they identify practical norms, individuals find a *shelter* protecting them from risks of negative social sanction within a group; it tells them about the practices which are collectively considered as the most *normal, unproblematic* ones. Practical norms may be uncertain, but they do not lie; they do not arise through one's own words and promises but through the permanent observation of others' practices concerning few matters, but the most urgent matters for one's social life. They engender the same situation of cognitive *comfort* as the one described by many constructivists when they conceptualise the *legitimacy*, that is, the complete internalisation of a norm (Wendt, 1999: 250; Hurd, 1999: 387-8; Shannon, 2000: 294). The difference lies in that a practical norm cannot be *partly* internalised: it is followed as long as it is practically identified as *being here* within the group; or it is not identified, thus not even envisaged. In other terms, there is no place for verbally-formulated decisions to follow them completely, partly, or not. For such a decision to happen, this norm must have lost its strict practical nature and entered one's discursive consciousness.

The two main structural components in Giddens' structuration theory can now be linked: the notion of *rules* that I just explored through my definition of "practical norms" (norms being one type of rules), to the notion of *resource*.

4. Socially-Sanctioned Behaviours as Political Resources

Not enacting the collective expected practice is a risky choice. Far from Neta Crawford's model of individual actors keen to permanently rationalise the norms they are following

(the collective expectations they constantly intend to meet) and to question their ethical foundation in order to reach the ethically-grounded good thing to do, I focused on this risky nature of breaking the routine, of questioning one's practices in the course of the everyday life. I now highlight the political importance of this risk, how it underlies any form of social power, including on the international political scene.

Obviously, every role assumed by a political actor in different social spaces does not cause, if threatened, the same urgency in his/her mind. Here, the gap between constructivist approaches and realist concerns for power can be bridged by the understanding that those socially-sanctioned roles in specific social spaces are also *resources*, mobilised to get and protect other (decisional) roles and identities. Indeed, Giddens (1984: xxxi) distinguishes "*allocative resources*" and "*authoritative resources*". The first ones concern the control over physical objects and aspects of the material world; the second, the control over individuals' activities. Nicholas Onuf (1998a: 64) reshapes this distinction, speaking of "*material resources*" and "*institutional resources*". Here, the use of institutional resources supposes *by definition* the mobilisation of others' practices.

If anything, social roles are institutional resources. As long as the role is recognised by a group of persons to one of them, it generates practices from the former towards the latter. In neglecting the norms implied in the day-to-day acknowledgement of roles, many rationalist analyses reify the political resources available. According to Onuf (1989: 64), ruled-practices and resources are inseparable: "*Resources are nothing until mobilized through rules, rules are nothing until matched to resources to effectuate rule*". "*Appropriate*" conducts are defined through rules but, in order to produce these identified appropriate conducts, an agent mobilises any means s/he can seize, that is, any means s/he can perceive as a valuable *resource*. After various experiments, the agent reproduces regular '*patterns*' of action whereby s/he knows s/he can reach this goal. "[R]ecognizable patterns in the results constitute agents' interests" (Onuf, 1998: 64).

But if an individual cannot adopt the "appropriate" conduct anymore, that is, meet others' expectations, s/he will not obtain others' behaviours whereby his/her roles were

previously acknowledged to him/her. In other terms, if s/he cannot avoid enduring severe or reiterated negative social sanctions, s/he could lose his/her position in one group (or more), or even be excluded from the group. As a final point, his/her whole existing identities and social power could even collapse.

My analysis of power articulating practical norms, social sanctions and institutional resources brings to an important political conclusion, here: the social power of political actors is accumulated by being accorded identities and roles within a specific group and by using these identities and roles as institutional resources in order to obtain useful practices and mobilise material resources from the members of the group; in so doing, these political actors can accumulate the required material and institutional resources in order to be acknowledged other identities and roles in other groups, thus obtaining new behaviours and new material resources from this new group of people that may lead them to “conquer” other identities and roles, thus, more social power, notably on the national and international political scene. And so on.

This shows that social power possesses a profound normative base: one has to make what is collectively expected from him/her in particular spaces, that is, to abide by the norms whereby specific groups of people acknowledge him/her specific identities and roles. In other words, a political actor needs to perceive what are the collective expectations held in particular groups which can provide him/her with institutional resources (statuses, roles) and material resources which may be valorised in other social groups in order to be acknowledged more identities and roles, and to mobilise more material resources and more useful practices from others, and so on.

As I put it above, these expectations and even this very political necessity to perceive them do by no means need to be verbally formulated and communicated in order to be “known” and followed. On the contrary, I point out here the political value of this practical state. When norms are not verbally formulated in a particular group, there are less vulnerable to ethical questioning which might conclude to their necessary abandon. Of course, someone may more or less hastily publicly reveal that one behavioural norm

conflicts with other norms (verbally ‘discovered’ as such) and even with acknowledged normative beliefs within the group, following Neta Crawford’s argument. But it will take time, a politically useful time.

And there is more: what characterises social power in my analysis in that it lies on *different* social spaces at the same time, one providing with political resources (in the form of people’s behaviours and material resources) that are mobilised in order to enter another social group and be accorded specific identities and roles by meeting the latter’s main expectations attached to these identities and roles, and so on. Now, there is no reason why the practical norms and the normative beliefs in one group shall be completely shared within the other, sometimes remote, groups. So it will be much more unlikely that a member of a first group perceives the whole practical norms a political actor is following within a second group and the potential disconnection between these norms and the normative beliefs this very actor claims to follow (and partially follows actually) when acting within the first group.

Therefore, a political entrepreneur who perceived practical norms in a group of people and conformed to them in order to be accorded identities and roles within this group (providing him/her with material and institutional resources used in other groups) shall assume that these norms need to be protected, since his/her political interests are entrenched in these norms. In that regard, the practical nature of these norms is actually a very good protection, and shall be protected itself¹.

To finish with this theoretical view which calls for empirical test and demonstration¹⁴, it must be noticed that the social groups committed in the accordance of the roles and identities of a political actor, that is, in the reproduction of his/her political resources, need not belong to a same national group, or state, or political society. On the contrary, according to Nicholas Onuf (1989: 45-65), the existence of such oblique norms and sanctions and resources between different social spaces – potentially at the global scale –

¹ For instance, available resources may be used in order to enhance within the group the risks of negative social sanctions for those who would be tempted by verbally formulating and ethically questioning these practices.

is precisely what makes an actual political society exist among these groups, even if their members do not recognise this political society as such and have not endowed it with a specific name.

To conclude this discussion, let me question the major empirical conclusions of Neta Crawford's book, in order to suggest what does a 'practical' application of my analysis look like.

[...] what mattered more in the long run was the making of persuasive ethical arguments containing normative beliefs about what was good and right to do to others. While the colonized had always resisted colonialism, sometimes with great success, what changed in the twentieth century was the content and balance of normative beliefs and the burden of proof. Whereas colonialism had been the dominant practice, or norm, for thousands of years, supported by strong ethical arguments, colonialism was denormalized and delegitimized in the twentieth century because anti-colonial reformers made persuasive ethical arguments." (Crawford, 2002: 4).

Such a view immediately makes me wonder whether these ethical arguments would have been listened and diffused, or even conceived, had the political leaders and social elites of the colonising states not progressively perceived new risks or problems in their day-to-day professional lives. Were ethical arguments (which had a quite long history without being largely diffused and without creating any urgency in political leaders' minds) the actual source of such risks? Or was it a combined shift in the global political and economic order that concretely made the resistances of the colonised (which remain underestimated in Crawford's account) more costly for individual diplomatic decision-makers and economic entrepreneurs of weakened European colonising states (after two World Wars), creating many new problems for political leaders, and inciting them to question their traditional practices and find other practical solutions with their domestic political and economic constituencies actively committed in the colonial system?

My analysis suggests the following hypothesis that colonisation existed as long as particular groups imitated such practices from others – mostly without questioning them – and no other group achieved (colonised people) or even tried (the large majority of the societies of the colonising states) to make these practices more problematic. That ethical

arguments helped the colonised in order to mobilise support domestically and internationally cannot be dismissed as an important factor of change. But what deserves a stronger empirical focus is to establish 1/ whether the colonised were keen either to fight physically or to argue verbally primarily not for an idea of general good (colonisation is bad) but because of a situation of permanent ontological threat in their lives (that induced permanent practical inferences in order to find any way to overcome this situation); and 2/ whether influential domestic groups in the colonising states and other powerful states and external groups which altogether previously endorsed colonial practices (and helped their reproduction in a practical way, in not questioning them) changed their sanctioning practices towards the colonisers and their political supports (from positive sanction to negative sanction, including by invoking and diffusing ethical arguments in order to discredit the colonisers, for instance) primarily because new costs and problems emerged in their day-to-day enactment of their professional and political roles. The sources of these problems would need to be empirically identified, but one may think of the competition with communist groups around the world, since the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for global hegemony was brought into the anti-colonial question (not because of its pure ethical grounds, but as a way for the governing groups in these states to mobilise new human and material forces around the world). One may also mention the growing financial costs of the colonial systems in a changing economic system, or contingent rivalries between Atlantic allies, etc.

A more precise conclusion in Crawford's work permits to illustrate further my view. "*Weakened colonizers could not resist the efforts of colonial reformers, who, for example, pushed for improvements in political representation and working conditions within colonies, which in turn enabled the colonized to more effectively resist the colonized and push for greater reform.*" (ibid: 105). Crawford envisages the competing hypothesis that these efforts for reforms were a manner for political leaders of colonial states to reduce resistances to colonial systems and at the same time a manner to maintain the colonial system and avoid tensions with the colonisers (ibid: 127). She interprets this rhetorical possibility as a proof of the importance of the alleged anti-colonial argument, though (ibid). This is a valid observation, but it minimises the crucial value of revealing

the political and social conditions whereby such a rhetorical practice can actually help the ethical argument to finally succeed, or failed. Anti-colonial forces did succeed, at least until today (not everywhere in every influential governing group around the world, though). But let us imagine they had failed; it may then have been possible to claim that these efforts from reformers precisely made anti-colonial forces fail, on the ground that they would have demobilised anti-colonial activists and their stakeholders and would have given time to the colonizers, allowing them reinforcing their colonial system, or reshaping it under new forms and new labels.

Conclusion

The existence of a ‘norm’ must be empirically demonstrated as a *real, practical expectation* concerning others’ conducts in a particular situation. In that sense, works on the force of arguments in international politics, like Neta Crawford’s one, are exposed to the epistemological and methodological bias to assume the existence of *norms* when only considering *normative ideas* that are *publicly invoked* by political actors – like political decision makers – without interpreting their motivations in a specific context. However, the only real norm in presence may be the norm calling upon actors to *invoke* a particular normative idea, and nothing else, without inspiring any new, consistent practice in a particular field¹⁵.

Indeed, I maintained that the foundational assumption about norms, and particularly the idea of systematic ethical foundation, does not help to understand what the normative phenomenon is and where it lies. Conversely, I articulated altogether the practical functioning of the human cognition, the centrality of the pervasive social sanction of individual practices as a major source of practical inferences activity, and the inescapable normative basis of the resources committed in the conquest and the reproduction of any form of social power in order to stress the necessity of a empirical, contextual and “processual” investigation aimed at understanding any specific normative change or any normative continuity related with particular political orders and interactions.

Notes

¹ “[B]ecause instrumental action is prompted by expectations and intentions, which are drawn from previously constituted social structures, constructivism subsumes rational choice under its more general principles.” (Ibid.)

² But when she adds that a normative belief can refer to what is “expected”, she blurs her previous dichotomy, since what is expected is precisely what characterises the behavioural norms, as her subsequent definitions of them show (they create expectations; they are commonly-expected behaviours; etc.).

³ Peter Katzenstein (1996: 5) defines norms as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors within a given identity”.

⁴ For an example of the supposed knowledge individuals have of the norms they are following and of their ethical foundation: “Both behavioural norms and normative beliefs usually have a traceable history; actors will often be able to say when and sometimes why they or their ancestors began a practice and why they thought a normative belief was right” (Crawford, 2002: 88).

⁵ Many other examples indicate this postulate that behavioural norms are derived from explicit normative beliefs, are “entailed” by them (ibid: 97, for instance).

⁶ Tests 4 and 5 are particularly problematic: how can one empirically establish that “the studied ethical arguments denormalized and delegitimized the dominant beliefs and practices”, “changed actors’ conceptions of possibility and interests”, “changed the political capabilities of actors” only due to “a change of the balance of beliefs”, etc.? Can all the possible “material interest explanations” be deductively imagined, in order to “compare the plausibility of an ethical argument explanation” with them? And how can one know if the normative beliefs seized by the actors “are taken seriously”? At least, this requires a long and profound empirical observation of these actors in order to come near to their subjectivity and their interests as they define them.

⁷ Otherwise, these interactants would be merely elaborating and repeating a play for the theatre.

⁸ Giddens does not equate the notion of reflexivity with the notion of discursive consciousness. Reflexivity is all the same implicated in individuals’ practical consciousness. This is a human cognitive competence bringing either to verbal rationalisations or – and more often – to practical inferences without these rationalisations. As Onuf (1989: 59) put it, “[...] Giddens has insisted that human beings are competent agents. They know what they are doing when they follow rules – they choose to follow a rule or not depending on their assessment of the consequences of either choice.”

⁹ Crawford (2002: 54) reminds a similar critique of this scholars’ coherentist bias expressed by Michel Foucault. Other examples can be found in Berger and Luckmann (1971: 26-7) and Anthony Giddens (1984).

¹⁰ See Crawford (ibid: 51) discussing the notion of “core beliefs” used by Douglas Blum.

¹¹ “As long as the routines of everyday life continue without interruption they are apprehended as unproblematic. But even the unproblematic sector of everyday life is so only until further notice, that is, until its continuity is interrupted by the appearance of a problem. When this happens, the reality of everyday life seeks to integrate the problematic sector into what is already unproblematic.” (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 37-8). Neta Crawford formulates this aspect many times, as when she presents the coherentist and the pragmatic conceptions of human cognition (Crawford, 2002: 44).

¹² Pierre Bourdieu’s “structuralist” constructivism differs in many ways from Giddens’ approach. He grants negative social sanction a fundamental role in social life but locates this social sanction in the “primary socialisation” of the individuals, that, in the first experiences within the family and its direct economic environment. This is what generates a set of durable dispositions entrenched in the economic conditions faced during this socialisation phase, which he calls the “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990: 52-57). But Bourdieu shares with Giddens the focus on social regularities, and equally considers that regularities are perceived by agents in their social environment in a *practical* way and that social sanction – with its risks – is a fundamental force for the permanent identification of these regularities. This practical rationality distinguishes the regularities and tells the agent about what are the probable and improbable outcomes in the near future *at the very moment* the agent is acting, without a systematic assessment of all the possibilities. This form of rationality operates “the transformation of the previous effect in an expected

goal” (ibid) while taking into account the risks of action, with its temporality, incertitude and irreversibility (ibid: 98-100).

¹³ Of course, this leaves room for ethical commitment at the expense of one’s roles, according to the depth of one’s conscious normative questioning. But the questions becomes merely a statistic one: how many people deepen at that point their ethical assessment for every practice they have in their day-to-day social life, considering all the incentives for seeking routine and ontological security in cognitive processes?

¹⁴ My Ph D thesis (Ambrosetti, 2005b) links this theoretical construction with empirical elements of demonstration.

¹⁵ This is what I suggested about the practice of invoking humanitarian concerns within the group of diplomatic delegations of the United Nations Security Council (Ambrosetti, 2005a).

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