

Ethical programs in meaning-constituting systems: an evolutionary achievement?

Diane Laflamme
Université du Québec à Montréal
Québec, Canada

Meaning appears within experience. Meaning always refers to meaning; it never reaches out of itself for something else than meaning. Luhmann describes it as “processing of itself by itself” (1995: 67). What is being processed? Evanescent events! Does it matter? For human beings, very much so: we need to find meaning in life and to make life worth living before we die; we talk endlessly about it; we may very well have invented writing – and all its high-tech derivatives – because we crave for meaning.

For Luhmann, meaning is sociology’s basic concept (1990: Chap.2; 1995: Chap.2). To refer to the relationship between meaning and system, he uses the word “constitution”¹; psychic systems and social systems are both “meaning-constituting systems” that respectively produce: meaningful thoughts by connecting one thought to another, and meaningful communication by connecting one communication to another. In both cases meaning is constituted within a recursive process that needs time; each thought and each communication refers to another thought or another communication and uses this reference process to move on from one present moment to the next one. If the process stops, consciousness stops, or communication comes to an end.

For the meaningful processing of human experience and action, connectivity is the keyword. Meaning-constituting systems are continuously “constituted” by their own search for more connectivity: they keep reproducing who or what they are, as systems different from their environment, inasmuch as their own operations keep allowing for more connectivity in the next operations. The connectivity of their operations gives them a lifeworld, and we could add that it also “gives them to themselves”, in their always changing but also always recognizable identity. They keep changing as systems, they are moving on with their life (as human beings or as organizations for example), but they nevertheless keep recognizing themselves and their identity is still recognizable for their observers.

¹ Luhmann criticizes Husserl’s use of the term constitution as “ambivalent in at least two regards” because it “fluctuates in its meaning, namely between the having of immediate evidence and performance on one hand and between receptive clarification and creative production on the other.” (1990: 69) In order to explain his own use of the term constitution, he writes: “meaning always appears within some delimitable context and yet at the same time always points beyond this context and lets us see other possibilities. What I want to understand and to describe with the term constitution is this relationship between a selectively restricted order and the openness of other possibilities, a relationship of mutual interdependence, of being-possible- only-together.” (1990: 25) Thus, the distinction “system and environment”, where system and environment are being possible only together, becomes in Luhmann’s theory the basic distinction constantly reproduced by the operations of meaning-constituting systems.

Meaning can be considered as an “evolutionary universal” and an “evolutionary achievement”, says Luhmann (1990: 84; 1995: 58). In social systems, we can observe that meaning is sometime condensed into Ethical programs²; are these also an “evolutionary development”? How can they contribute to socio-cultural evolution or to “the Quality of Social Existence in a Globalising World” – the very theme of this International Conference?

It would be presumptuous to claim that we will propose a definitive answer to this question, but we will keep it in mind, like a horizon of meaningful interrogation, as we search for a link between meaning-constituting selections and meaning-based evolutionary achievements. We will describe how meaning references are bound to a horizon of potentialities and how this horizon takes the form of a “double constitutive horizon” when observed in the three dimensions of experience and meaning: the Factual, the Temporal and the Social dimensions. When meaning references are bundled together and symbolically generalized, the system is in a better position to anticipate what is expected as the next connection between its operations; generalizations and expectations work together in a circular process. Looking at this will allow us to observe how morality works as a generalization of ethico-moral meaning references, how it applies the schematism “good or bad” to condition meaning references, and how it stabilizes moralized behavioral expectations into ethical programs. If the theme of the program is an ethical one, it will guide the system in its selections, giving it criteria for the application of the two value of the code: this is good/this is not good. Programs will vary during the history of a meaning-constituting system, and they can be planned. Since the process of evolution itself cannot be planned, the contribution of ethical programs to evolutionary achievements might be problematic.

1. Meaning references are bound to a horizon of possibilities

The conscious thought or the communication that is distinguished as meaningful by a specific operation of selection is inseparable from the horizon against which it is distinguished: “a reactualizable core of meaning arises and, inextricably bound up with it, a horizon of reference to other possibilities” (Luhmann, 2002: 120).

For systems that constitute and use meaning, actual experience and actions are always given within a horizon of further possibilities. “They experience themselves, their environment, and everything that functions in it as an element, as a selection within a horizon that includes all possibilities and indicates further ones”, says Luhmann (1995: 207). The system cannot command its environment as it pleases but whenever necessary, any operation of the system can push back its horizon still further, under the constraints imposed by the system’s own capacity for connectivity. The system’s horizon “always recedes when it is approached, but only in accordance with the system’s own operations. It can never be pushed through or transcended because it is not a boundary. It accompanies every system operation when this refers to something outside the system” (1995: 17; 1989: 22).

When a selection is actualized, it also has the effect to virtualize all the potentialities that were not distinguished. But what is not actualized during the process of distinguishing a distinction is not eliminated; it is merely displaced “into a state of momentary inactuality, says Luhmann. It

² Luhmann’s translators refer both to “moral programs” and to “ethical programs”. In this paper, we will use “Ethical program” only, in order to mark a stronger distinction from the “moral code” (good or bad). To describe the link between Ethics and Morality, Luhmann indicates that Ethics “is to be understood as a reflection theory of morality”, (1989: 141). Reflection is one of the three forms of self-reference (1995: 443-444).

can be preserved as a potentiality in the process of re-virtualization and carried over into new horizons". Meaning processing requires a "continual actualization of potentialities" (1995: 65-66). Every selection made by the system is simultaneously an actualization and a potentialisation (or virtualization): the system selects "this and not something else". Here, "something else" designates what is potentialised (or virtualized). When a distinction distinguished "this", the other side of the distinction ("...and not the rest") is not erased, it is also "co-presented along with the distinction" (2000: 59). The other possibilities do not disappear, they are preserved and they could reappear in a subsequent actualization of meaning, as the system will keep searching for more connectivity.

Meaning-constituting systems can only operate sequentially and selectively. At any time, only one of the possibilities can be pursued or actualized, but the system exposes itself to new possibilities, opens itself to new horizons, a process that Luhmann describes in direct reference to Husserlian phenomenology (Laflamme, 2006a).

As meaning, the world is accessible everywhere: "in every situation, in any detail, at each point on the scale from concrete to abstract", but at a given time only very little can form the actual focus of the conscious attention of a psychic system or be treated as an actual theme of communication by a social system. (1989: 17; 1995: 70) Nonetheless, the possibilities of further meaningful experiencing and acting are indicated in the horizon of actual experience and action, even if they cannot yet become available at the level of operations because the meaning-constituting system is still not complex enough to show the required connectivity that would allow more complex conscious thoughts or more complex communications.

2. Meaning references can be selected in a double horizon for each one of the three dimensions of meaning.

Luhmann describes how every operation of a meaning-constituting system has to locate its intended meaning within the structure of the three mutually independent dimensions of meaning and experience: the Fact dimension, the Time (or temporal) dimension and the Social dimension. In every meaning these three dimensions appear together (1995: 83-106; 1990: 34-43).

In each dimension the two constitutive horizons function together, and the system can redirect its operations from one horizon to the other within each one of the dimensions and between them. « A horizon is not a boundary; one cannot step across it", repeats Luhmann, but at any time, one can turn back to the opposite horizon (1995: 77). The term horizon is a useful metaphor here since it refers to an experience that we are familiar with: we know that changing direction, turning back to orient ourselves to the horizon opposite to the one chosen previously does not imply that we lose our lifeworld and its familiar references. We experience a direct access to meaning, in its actualized form (A) and in the non-actualized form (non-A) in very much the same way that we experience a direct access to our lifeworld, when we move in space from one horizon to another one (Laflamme, 2006b). Luhmann describes it as follow:

“ ‘turning back’ means that any pursuit of intentions (by a psychic system) or themes (by a communication system) is always experienced as approaching, never as receding from, a horizon. When one is absorbed in a single object, its external world does not recede into an ever-greater distance, and one does not need to unwind all the sequences of experience and action that have occurred for the opposite horizon to

come into view. It is always represented with the object and it is always directly available as an immediacy of turning back” (1995: 77)

The meaningful references can pertain, for example, to an object perceived or consciously intended by a psychic system or to a theme or a contribution to a theme in a communication system. To select its next operation among all the possible references, the system aggregates some of the possibilities, makes a bundle out of meaning references and attributes them to one or the other of the double horizon available in each dimension of experience and meaning. The system can oscillate between the two horizons (1998: 10). In each one of the three dimensions, meaningful references can be bundled together according to a specific perspective.

The Fact dimension is constituted “in that meaning divides the reference structure of what is meant into “this” and “something else” (1995: 76). Thus, “two horizons cooperate in the factual constitution of meaning” and “twofold descriptions giving internal and outer profile are necessary to fix the meaning of an object” (1995: 77). The double horizon is: internal horizon (self; consciousness) or external horizon (other-than-self; phenomena). Meaning-constituting systems can thus distinguish between self-reference and external reference, although this distinction remains a system-internal distinction, since the system cannot carry its operations in the environment (operative closure; 2000: 9). Conscious operations can only happen within consciousness, communication operations can only happen within communications.

In their experiencing and acting, meaning constituting systems distinguish between two Temporal horizons which meet and are linked together in the present: that of the past and that of the future. The system can operate only in the present, of course, but it can also recursively refer backward or forward to previous perceptions or thoughts (psychic systems) or to other communications (social systems). The actualization of meaning is time-related: it happens in an instant of experience or of communication. Meaning-constituting systems use the actuality of their operations as starting point and connecting point to further meaning references that extend in the past and in the future. (2000: 139)

The Social dimension “concerns what one at any time accepts as like oneself, as an “alter ego”. (1995: 80). Its double constitutive horizon is: ego and alter ego. One can ask of every meaning whether another experiences it in exactly the same way he or she does. The Social dimension of experience and meaning is constituted “by a non-ego being recognized as another ego, being experienced as the bearer of its own albeit different experience and perspective of the world.” (1990: 37)

The following table shows, in a brief summary and for each one of the three dimensions of experience and meaning, how the double horizon is indicated, how meaning is constituted in each dimension, how oscillation and memory are linked to steering and control, how the thematization of meaning references is observed in each dimension and, more importantly for the present investigation, how moralized themes can be used in the Social dimension.

| Dimension of meaning and experience | Fact dimension | Time dimension | Social dimension |
|---|---|---|--|
| <i>Double constitutive horizon:</i> | Horizon of self-reference Horizon of external reference | Horizon of the past Horizon of the future | Horizon of Ego Horizon of Alter Ego |
| <i>How meaning is constituted:</i> (1990: 36-39) | With meaning appearing materially or objectively in "Otherness", in being-one-thing-and-not-another. The identity of an object intended by a psychic system or of a theme used by a communication system stands as well specified against a background of other possibilities. | With factual identities fixed in their own temporal reference schemes, for example dated or assigned to the past or to the future. In the present, meaning extending into the past or the future can be presented to the system (for ex.: the steps necessary to realize a future goal can be chosen in the present) | By non-ego being recognized as another ego being experienced as the bearer of it own albeit different experience and perspectives of the world |
| <i>Oscillation and memory:</i> N.B.: Steering belongs to the concept of oscillation Control belongs to the concept of memory (1997:364-68) | Intentional operations are a permanent oscillation between the double horizon of the Fact dimension of meaning : hetero-reference (phenomena) and self-reference (consciousness) (2002: 46) | Memory represents the presence of the past and oscillation the presence of the future. To "constitute" its future, the system opens possibilities of oscillations. To constitute its past, the system selects what will be forgotten. | Self-steering or steering by other than self Self-control or control by other than self |
| <i>Meaning references can be thematized in communication:</i> (1995: 157) | Meaning references are condensed into themes. The system's connectivity is improved: contributions to themes can be more easily distinguished and selected. | Themes and contributions to a theme can be recursively recalled and anticipated. Themes are old or new; they can become obsolete. | When the theme is moralized in communication: the contribution refers to the conditions according to which one approves or disapproves of other and the self. (1991: 84) |

3. Expectations simplify the search for connectivity

As described by Luhmann, the phenomenon of meaning "appears as a surplus of references to other possibilities of experience and action. Something stands in the focal point, at the center of intention, and all else is indicated marginally as the horizon of an 'and so forth' of experience

and action” (1995: 60). We have described the self-propelling process of actualization, virtualization, reactualization, revirtualization that allows a meaning-constituting systems to move from one selection to the other, without losing access to the surplus of references that characterizes meaning. The notion of a horizon, where this surplus of references is preserved, was expanded when we introduced the presentation of the three dimensions of experience and meaning, since each dimension has a double constitutive horizon.

Meaning constituting systems can also generalize meaning. They bundle together many meaning references, excluding what does not fit, in order to get to a generalization that allows more connectivity between its operations. The repertoire of possibilities becomes narrower but the system can orient itself more quickly: it knows what to expect.

Luhmann describes a feed-back loop between generalizations and expectations: on one hand, generalizations “condense the referential structure of every meaning into expectations, which indicate what a given meaning situation foresees”; on the other hand, “the requisite expectations and proofs of worth in concrete situations guide and correct generalizations. By means of expectations that one directly tests or that one cannot give up without considerable disorientation, one decides how far to push generalization” (1995: 96).

The generalization of meaning is sometimes done with the use of “symbolic abbreviations” and Luhmann refers to this as the “symbolic generalization of meaning”. He gives examples of such abstractions or schematisms used by the system to make sure that once a generalization of meaning has proven to be useful, it can be made available again and again:

“symbolic abbreviations representing highly complex expectational situations are necessary for ongoing orientation. Stipulations of what should be done, values, concepts of obligation, and references to custom, normality, or what is usual are, for example, abstractions with this function. They have settled on the meta-level of expectations that are *expected* and serve there as a surrogate for a tedious investigation, enumeration, and publication of the actual expectations implied in any given situation.” (1995: 306)

Morality is such a symbolic generalization, according to Luhmann; it appears in communication since moral regulation and thematization require communication. In moralized communications the binary schematism (or binary code³) “good or bad” is used to generalize meaning references: the complexity of alter/ego relations is thus reduced to expressions of esteem for what is generalized as “good”, or disdain for what is generalized as “not-good” (1995: 236). By esteem, Luhmann means a “generalized” recognition and evaluation which honor the fact that others accord with the “expectations” one believes must be assumed for social relations to continue. (1995: 235)

Symbolic generalizations of meaning “stamp identities onto the flux of experience” (1995: 94). These identities are reductive references, but they make it easier for the meaning-constituting system to join its operations onto one another. For example, what has been generalized in a moralized communication under the symbol “good” is a reductive reference to “the good”, but

³ Luhmann uses the terms schematism, scheme and code. For example: “Morality is to be understood as the coding of communication by the binary scheme of good and bad (or, if subjectivized, of good and evil). The code is always applicable when the behavior that is the subject of communication is sanctioned by the bestowal or withdrawal of esteem or contempt. (1989: 139)

with this reduction the meaning reference acquires re-availability: it can be made available in different kinds of situations (Fact dimension), at other points in time (Time dimension), and with other possible partners of communication (Social dimension). Values, norms, programs are all notions that refer to such a reduction. The following table shows how they can be observed as generalization, as behavioral expectations, and as moralized behavioral expectations in the three dimensions of experience and meaning:

| | The 3 dimensions of meaning | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|---|
| | Fact: | Time: | Social: |
| Symbolically generalized meaning references are made re-available: | In different kinds of situations | At other points in time | With other partners of communication |
| Ethico-moral references are those symbolically generalized by applying the binary schematism good or bad, | Moralized values and ethical programs | Moral norms | Esteem or disdain for the whole person as a participant in communication: |
| Behavioral expectations are modalized: (SS306) | By distinguishing stable values (symbolic abbreviations representing highly complex expectational situations), and programs, as criteria for the allocation of each of the two values schematized in a code | Norms as forms of expectations, | Consensus or dissent about: values schematized by the code, programs, goals, and norms |
| Morality: Behavioral expectations moralized according to the binary schematism good or bad, esteem or disdain : | Moralized values, Ethical programs | Moral norms | Consensus or dissent about: moral values schematized by the code, ethical programs and moral norms. |

In a binary schematism, the positive value of the code can be transformed in the negative value and vice versa; if we take the moral schematism, for example, what is good can be bad and what is bad can be good. “Good” is a symbolic abbreviation, the designated value of a code, whose negative value is “not-good”. Binary coding, like the one used by the moral, is a way to impose conditions on the operations of selection. It is about the criteria guiding the application of the code that opinions might differ.

What the system indicates as “good” or excludes as “not-good” (or bad) is decided on the basis of a program (2000: 204). “A program is a complex of conditions for the correctness (and thus the social acceptability) of behavior” (1995: 317). An ethical program will organize the assignment of the value “good” and the value “bad” according to criteria that will be subject to consensus or dissent (1989: 127). The code is stable, but we can observe how ethical programs have varied over the history of human societies. Meaning is constituted through a recursive

linking of operations: whatever can become morally relevant results from a connection with whatever already possesses moral relevance. Whatever counts morally reproduces itself. Morality is a symbolic generalization and, as such, it works through a reductive simplification of meaning references bundled together. Symbolic generalizations are “contained and refabricated within a network of expectations. They organize – or better, continually reorganize – expectations, and depending on the course of experience and action, they take up material from the underlying referential strata of meaning complexes or allow what is too seldom used to sink back down.” (1995: 96-97) Fortunately, the simplification of meaning references does not make the world shrink; the full complexity of the world remains accessible to meaning-constituting systems, even though they sometime let some unwelcome meaning references “sink back down” quite deeply! Complexity cannot be erased:

It is a mark of conscious experience, as opposed to purely organic selection, that it regulates itself through this self-overburdening, with complexity and contingency regulating the selective processing of experience in a very specific way, viz. in the form of meaning. This requires that the complexity of other possibilities be constituted within experience itself and *remain preserved there*. Experience and action are unceasing selections but cannot simply eliminate those alternatives not chosen [...] they can only neutralize them. Complexity cannot simply be “erased,” [...] but is, so to speak, only placed in brackets, reduced from moment to moment in continually different ways, and always remains preserved as the most generally constituted selection domain, as the “source” of constantly new and constantly different additional choices – as the world. (1990: 27)

Luhmann proposes that it is the task of Ethics to make sure the generalizations adopted under the label morality are scrutinized: “An ethics capable of engaging with contemporary conditions would have to be able to arrive at a judgment as to whether moral standards can or cannot be applied”. (1994: 30) “Only ethics can make a moral judgment about morality”, says Luhmann (1989: 140). We can observe how widely Ethical programs vary over history; one could wonder if they always qualify as evolutionary achievements.

4) Linking meaning-constituting selections and evolutionary achievements

Apart from his interest for meaning-constituting systems, Luhmann is also searching for a general theory of system evolution⁴ (1990: 66; 2000: 213-226), whose purpose would be to provide an explanation for the emergence of complexity: “A theoretical interest that goes under the name of evolutionary theory focuses on the condition of possibility for structural change, and constrained by this focus, on explaining the emergence of structural and semantic complexity.” (2000: 213)

The two processes of meaning constitution and system evolution are both a selective changing of possibilities into actualities. Following this first observation, we will look for more correlations between the two of them.

When he describes the production of meaning out of this bulk of references, through meaning-constituting operations, Luhmann enumerates a cascade of processes that work as a unity:

⁴ Luhmann notes that: «The scientific usage of the term evolution is not necessarily so precise. Especially in the social sciences, pre-Darwinist notions prevail. Merely descriptive phase models of social development (...) are frequently offered as a theory of evolution.» (2000: 213)

“Meaning is the unity of actualization and virtualization, of re-actualization and re-virtualization, as a self-propelling process (which can be conditioned by systems).” (1995: 65)

When he refers to system evolution, Luhmann indicates that three types of system-specific mechanisms are required: “mechanisms for the projection of possibilities, mechanisms for the selection of suitable possibilities, and mechanisms for stabilizing what has been chosen by the system.” (1990: 66-67; 2000: 214) Meaning-constituting selections play a powerful role in evolutionary developments:

“Since possibilities can be thematized and negated within meaning itself, meaning makes possible a tremendous increase in the power of all three evolutionary mechanisms and thus (...) makes possible a substantial acceleration of the evolution process. In the meaningfully identified premises of experience processing, it is not only what, in any instance, is actually chosen that is firmly stabilized – i.e., made continually available – but also **the whole set of possibilities chosen from.**” (we underline; 1990: 67)

The generalization of meaning through symbolic schematisms such as the one used by morality are reductive, the code good or bad is applied according to programs that can provoke dissent and conflict but, let us repeat it again: the world will not shrink and complexity will not be erased. Evolution at the level of meaning-constituting systems could be “an evolution of the technique of generalizing” (1990: 69).

Presented side by side, the constitution of meaning and the emergence of evolutionary achievements can be summarized in the following profiles, underlining the notions of complexity, expectations, the conditioning of selections and the criteria of success:

| MEANING IS CONSTITUTED... | EVOLUTIONARY ACHIEVEMENTS ARE OBTAINED... |
|---|--|
| <p>Within complexity: meaning-constituting systems increase their own complexity and reduce the difference between their complexity and the complexity of the world</p> | <p>Within complexity: evolution is a “structural change that proceeds in the direction of increased complexity, both on the level of the world as a whole and in some (not all!) systems” (1990: 66)</p> |
| <p>How: Self-propelling process of actualization, virtualization, reactualization, revirtualization</p> | <p>How: 3 types of system-specific mechanisms: (circular) (2000: 224)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possibility production (variation) 2. Selection 3. Stabilization |
| <p>Through structures of expectations: expectations that are fulfilled acquire a structural value. They have proven their worth by allowing for more connectivity so the system orients itself to these expectations in order to choose more rapidly and with less risk its next operation.</p> <p>Expectations also allow the system to bridge discontinuities between the 3 dimensions of meaning.</p> | <p>Through structures of expectations: “Every situation allows possibilities for connection more or less room to play. (...) The ability to connect on is secured by the self-reference of the elements and by structures of expectations. Within this superfluity of possibilities exist distinct probabilities that are fixed within the meaning horizon of the moment and can be observed as probabilities. This room for play can, if it is structured by distinct probabilities, be understood as a potential for evolution at the same time.” (1995: 434)</p> |
| <p>Through conditioned selections: the system refers to a binary code and applies the code according to the criterias stabilized in a program</p> | <p>Through conditioned selections: Evolution cannot be planned. (1990: 181)</p> |
| <p>Through Morally conditioned selections : the code (good or bad) is invariant; ethical programs are variable and change historically (1996: 31)</p> <p>The moral code is an “evolutionary universal”, but it is “void of content”; ethical programs “are stable because they are ambivalent. They produce a semantic cover for unresolved conflicts.” (1996: 31-32)</p> | <p>Outside of moralized conditioning : “Evolution has led to a world that has very many different possibilities of observing itself without marking one of these possibilities as the best or only correct one.” (2002: 156)</p> |
| <p>Success: Morality succeeds “if it succeeds in binding the conditions under which one can relate to one another as a person and as a human being back to the construction of a common social system (or to having already lived in such a social system), and if, conversely, the continuation of such a system’s operations is inconceivable without considering what human beings personally think of each other and how they include each other’s complexity and freedom of decision into their own self interpretation.” (1995: 238)</p> | <p>Success: “In systems that are successful in evolutionary terms, more independence typically amounts to a greater dependency on the environment. A complex system can have a more complex environment and is capable of processing a greater amount of irritation internally, that is, it can increase its own complexity more rapidly.” (2000: 158)</p> |

The environment can be experienced and processed by meaning-constituting systems only in the form of meaning (1995:102). As it is shown on the first and the last row of the preceding table, more complexity and success imply more dependency to the environment for both meaning-constituting selections and evolutionary achievements. But the success of evolutionary achievements does not seem to require that all meaning-constituting systems be necessarily enlisted into a sweeping movement towards complexity; Luhmann observes that the movement in the direction of increased complexity appears “both on the level of the world as a whole and in some (not all!) systems” (1990: 66). This implies that even at a small scale, meaning-constituting selections in general, and ethico-moral selections in particular, are differences that can make a quite a difference! They contribute to the meaningful experience of other meaning-constituting systems. If they are beneficial to the adapting system, they also leave the environment of other systems richer in possibilities even though the evolutionary leap might look quite insignificant at the level of the system itself.

“structural changes in individual systems make the environment of other systems more complex, and these react by exhausting new possibilities, or by adaptation or indifference – in any case, by increasing the selectivity of their state. Structural changes beneficial to the adapting system can, in turn, leave the environment of other systems richer in possibilities so that, although complexity does not necessarily increase for all systems or types of systems, it does for their relationship, which is then available to meaningful experience as the world.” (1990: 66)

Meaning-constituting systems, the ones that produce conscious thoughts and the ones that produce moralized communications, might find there an unexpected way “to do good”, that is by contributing to leave each other’s environment richer in possibilities of meaningful experience. Meaning is a medium, a universal one and the most general one. To distinguish forms into a medium does not exhaust it, it rather regenerate its possibilities⁵.

Luhmann proposes a short description of how evolutionary achievements at the level of meaning systems could be observed in the three dimensions of experience and meaning (1990: 68).

| The 3 dimensions of experience and meaning | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | Fact: | Time: | Social: |
| Evolution at the level of meaning systems: | Possibility of introducing more varied forms of human behavior into the society and of accepting more individually formed psychic systems. | - a mobilization of what can be seen as present; - a more complex thematizing and planning of the future; and - a capitalization of the past. | Freedom and equality : social relationship are abstracted and replaced by the formula of the free and equal subject, the constituting consciousness, whose function no longer depends on particular attributes or membership, and whose role may be assumed by anyone. |

⁵ Forms are generated in a medium via a tight coupling of the elements loosely coupled in the medium. The medium is constant; it imposes limits to the forms that can be generated in it. The forms alternate; they are subject to variations and they can be generated, forgotten and remembered. Luhmann uses the example of words as forms in the medium of sound. A meaningful “form” does not exhaust the possibilities contained in the medium “meaning”, it rather selects and condenses inside the form some of the meaning references and, in so doing, it distinguishes itself from the remaining possibilities contained in the medium. See Luhmann, 2000, Chapter 3.

Evolutionary achievements at the level of moral coding and ethical programming would require the same: accepting more individually formed psychic systems, a more complex thematizing of the future; freedom and equality. Without proposing a “program”, let us conclude by saying that “to do good” in our project of improving “the Quality of Social Existence in a Globalising World”, we might decide to move along these lines and to invest our meaning-constituting capacity in experience and action that will make the environment of other conscious systems and other communication systems richer in possibilities. This might prove to be the condition of possibility of our own evolutionary achievements.

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