



An economic approach to malevolence

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Abstract

Economic analysis is limited without logical justification to benevolence. This paper introduces an analysis of malevolence. It assumes that malevolence may be structural or conjunctural. We distinguish between psychology and behavior of individuals. Conjunctural malevolence may occur when behavior is no more consistent with psychology.

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Introduction

Malevolence is omnipresent in cultural anthropology with general presuppositions assigned to malevolent and benevolent populations. The recent debate on the Shoah begun by D.J. Godlhamer (1997) has confirmed this idea, the Germans being presupposed by the author to be genocidal. The recent analysis of genocides has further accentuated these presuppositions whether in Rwanda, Bosnia or Sierra Leone. Malevolence thus is cultural. Malevolence is the characteristic of a population, of a culture, or again, of a period.

On the contrary to cultural anthropology, malevolence is nearly absent from economic analysis. According to G. Becker (1974) the hypothesis of "envy and hate" is either minimized, in the name of the protection provided by the society (A. Smith 1776), or exaggerated to become the driving force of life (T.Veblen 1899)¹.

In fact, this hypothesis of behavior is generally minimized in economic thinking in so far as behavior is determined by hedonism for oneself and for others. According to J. Harsanyi (1977) utilitarianism implies moral conventions concerning good will and moral sympathy; even if they are "true preferences", we should exclude antisocial preferences. *"In particular, we should exclude all antisocial preferences such as sadism, envy, resentment, and malice"*. Not the person but the "part" of the person concerned by antisocial sentiments is to be excluded from the community.

To want others' harm and to find satisfaction in it is a general attitude which deserves to be carefully defined in economic language. We interpret it here in an interpersonal framework, while realizing that there also exists deliberate malevolence with regards to oneself, objects, or animals: this type of malevolence is not treated here. In the first section we define the spectrum of "volency" (the disposition towards an other). This definition allows us to oppose a structural malevolence (the spectrum of volency) against a conjunctural malevolence (deformation in the spectrum of volency). Malevolence can be part of a number of configurations and circumstances; it is not by itself an *a priori* about human nature. This distinction between structural and conjunctural malevolence may be analyzed through the difference between psychology and behavior of the individual (second section). An illustration of the volatility of volency towards the others, passing from benevolence to malevolence is given (third section).

¹ "... every one's desire is to get the better of all by the accumulation of goods", Veblen, 1889, with regard to the "financial rivalry" and to the "envious comparison".

1. An initial approach to the spectrum of “volency”; structural or conjunctural malevolence

Malevolence consists of wanting the harm of the Other and preferring that his utility is diminished. According to H. Sidgwick (1907) it is as natural as benevolence and is composed of the following three factors: " a dislike of the presence of its object and a desire to inflict pain on it, and also a capacity of deriving pleasure from the pain thus inflicted".

More recently, malevolence has been expressed in utilities function (for example Cazenave and Morrisson 1978) . Let for an individual i the utility function

$$U_i[u_i(x_i), u_j(x_j)] \text{ or } U_i(x_i, x_j)$$

An individual i will be benevolent, egoistic or malevolent if

$$\partial U_i / \partial u_j > 0 \text{ or } \partial U_i / \partial x_j > 0 \text{ (benevolent) ;}$$

$$\partial U_i / \partial u_j < 0 \text{ or } \partial U_i / \partial x_j < 0 \text{ (malevolent) ;}$$

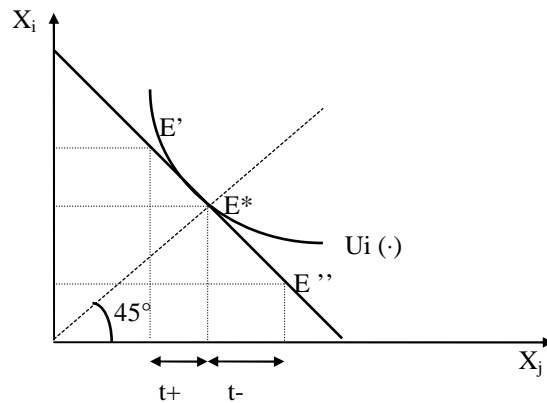
$$\partial U_i / \partial u_j = 0 \text{ or } \partial U_i / \partial x_j = 0 \text{ (egoistic)}$$

In this case malevolence consists of wanting evil for the Other. The Other is considered negatively in the sense that his lowering of utility is, deep down in me, what increases my utility in the end². This definition is only related to the individual psychology and does not imply anything about behavior. Let us imagine an individual who has an egalitarian preference on income distribution. Figure 1 represents his optimization.

If the psychology of the individual is egalitarian, he maximizes his utility function at point E^* . His behavior depends on his initial position in the income distribution. If the initial situation is at point E' individual i makes a positive transfer t^+ toward j and acts in a benevolent way. On the contrary, if the initial repartition is at point E'' he desires a transfer from j , t^- , and acts in a malevolent manner. If the initial situation is at point E^* he is totally satisfy and no act occur.

² A pathological case that goes further this definition may be illustrate by a malevolent individual who wants evil for other but must suffer a loss of utility by fact of his intention being culpable and punishing him.

Figure 1
Psychology and behavior

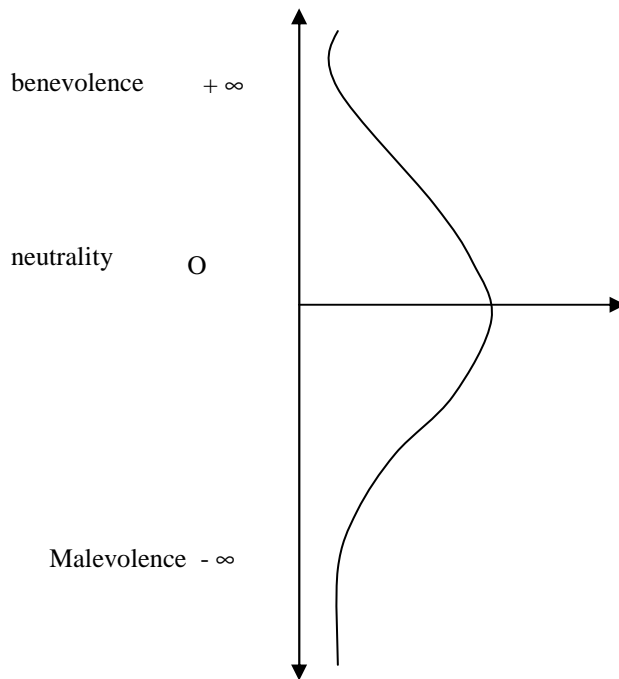


This example illustrates the distinction between the psychology and the behavior of an individual. de Graaff (1957), Scott (1972), and Brennan (1973) have also used the hypothesis of malevolence in this way. They argue that voluntary redistribution could come about through the motive of malevolence. They clearly distinguish between the psychology (the motive of malevolence) and the behavior (the benevolent voluntary redistribution).

Our analysis develops this distinction in the case of malevolence. We introduce a representation of volency for an individual towards the others. We may assume that malevolence, as benevolence, concerns few people. By making the hypothesis that my neutrality concerns most others and my benevolence or malevolence is reduced to a few people, an initial representation (figure 2) can be given of the spectrum of "volence" towards the other (the disposition towards the others).

Of course, some people may have a great benevolence and others may have a great malevolence, instead of a neutrality concerning most others. However, the general case seems probably to be a strong neutrality and a benevolence and a malevolence reduce to a few people. Indeed, whatever the form of the spectrum of volency towards the others, it is just an illustration, and not a general rule. It serves us to oppose structural malevolence to conjunctural malevolence.

Figure 2. Spectrum of the attention towards others



This first illustration is related to the way one person sees the others, its psychology. It characterizes the structural situation of malevolence. To this "structural" conception of volency, we may oppose a "conjunctural" conception founded on the fact that each individual may develop, depending on the events, all values of volency: benevolence, malevolence and neutrality form a complete spectrum through which our behavior may pass at any moment. H. Sidgwick reminds us that malevolence is the "exact counterpart" of benevolence and that one can not avoid passing towards it in a case of aggression, for example. Each of us is capable of passing from extreme benevolence to extreme malevolence with regards to some people, while remaining neutral towards others categories of the population. Malevolence is transitory, resulting from aggression for instance. Then conjunctural malevolence is related to behavior.

The spectrum may in this way experience conjunctural "deformations", for example, in case of conflict, an increase in the distribution of the zone of malevolence. It is possible therefore to conceive malevolence simultaneously (structural effect) with benevolence and also alternatively (conjunctural effect) in a process.

A classic example of a cause of deformation of the spectrum of volency is inheritance. Families appear relatively united, but may dissolve through conflicts connected with inheritance. Benevolence transforms itself sometimes into malevolence. Thus, a shock to the structure (such as inheritance) will transform it more or less depending on its degree of robustness and its resistance to shocks. Another example may be found. Let us consider the most famous anthropology of malevolence: that of the Iks as theorized by C. Turnbull (1987). A population *a priori* benevolent becomes malevolent following the classifying of their hunting grounds as a nature reserve. Thus people may be successively in a given period benevolent and malevolent.

To capture the distinction between psychology and behavior, we focus, in the next section, on the economic analysis of the deformation of the spectrum of volency, i.e. the conjunctural malevolence.

2. Conjunctural malevolence: an analysis

We have considered that the structural form of the spectrum of volency represents the psychology of the individual toward the others. If his behavior is consistent with his psychology then the spectrum does not know any deformation. The conjunctural deformation of the spectrum comes from a difference between the behavior and the psychology³. The structural form corresponds to an adequation between the psychology and the behavior, whereas the conjunctural deformation marks a difference between the psychology and the behavior.

This distinction may be illustrated by a simple game. The following matrix 1 represents this game:

Matrix 1

Behaviors	B	M
B	bb,bb	bm, mb
M	mb, bm	mm, mm

In this game, B and M are successively benevolent and malevolent behaviors. Bb is the gain from the strategy benevolent/benevolent, whereas mm is the result of the strategy malevolent/malevolent and corresponding to the Nash equilibrium. On the contrary bb is a mutually beneficial strategy.

³ In this case, cognitive dissonance may induce a modification in the behavior or a change in the psychology, or also some psychological troubles. However, we don't treat this question here.

We now set the psychology of the individual. We write α_i the disposition of i toward the others and $(1-\alpha_i)$ the self-interest of i . Any restriction is put on the value of α . It may be positive in case of benevolence or negative in case of malevolence. Let us assume also that α_j is the expected disposition of others j toward i and $(1-\alpha_j)$ the expected self-interest of others j by i for themselves. As α_i , α_j may be positive or negative according to the expected benevolence or malevolence of j by i .

In this game, the benevolent strategy will be choose only if

$$(bb) (1-\alpha_i)\alpha_j + (bb)\alpha_i\alpha_j + (bm) (1-\alpha_i)(1-\alpha_j) + (mb)\alpha_i(1-\alpha_j) > (mb)(1-\alpha_i)\alpha_j + (bm)\alpha_i\alpha_j \quad (1)$$

The behavior assume by individual i depends on three parameters: the expected gain of his behavior, his psychology, and the expected behavior of the others. From this, four results are derived.

1. That for any expected value of the behavior of the others, it exists a critical value α^*i of the psychology of i which determine his benevolent or malevolent behavior;
2. As corollary, that an individual with a benevolent psychology may act in a malevolent way and conversely;
3. More the expected value of the benevolent behavior of the others is high, less it is necessary to have a benevolent psychology to act in a benevolent manner, and the same for malevolence;
4. If individual has a perfect egoistic psychology, parameter of his psychology is equal to 0 and his behavior depends only on the expected behavior of the others.

We may illustrate these results by a numerical example. Let the following game in matrix 2

Matrix 2

Behaviors	B	M
B	2,2	0,1
M	1,0	-2,-2

The inequation (1) becomes

$$(1-\alpha_i)\alpha_j + 2\alpha_i\alpha_j + \alpha_i(1-\alpha_j) > 0 \quad (2)$$

1. For α_i benevolent and equal to 0,5. Any value $\alpha_j < -0,5$ induces a malevolent behavior of i . Then, with a benevolent psychology the individual will have a malevolent behavior because he expected a malevolent behavior of the others. A deformation of the spectrum of volency is produced. We attend a difference between psychology and behavior.
2. Conversely, for α_i malevolent and equal to $-0,5$, any value $\alpha_j > 0,5$ induces a benevolent behavior of i . As i expected a benevolent behavior of the others he acts himself in a benevolent way. He assumes a distinct behavior to his psychology. Again a deformation of the spectrum of volency appear, but in the benevolent side.

In these conditions, a change in expected behavior of the others may imply a change in the behavior of individual i who may pass from benevolence to malevolence or from malevolence to benevolence. Malevolence may be conjunctural, corresponding to a behavior distinct to the psychology. This shift from benevolence to malevolence may occur in particular context where expected behavior of the others favors malevolent acts. The next section gives an example of this configuration.

3. An illustration of conjunctural malevolence.

In our analysis, the situations of malevolence are not random, they occur in a social sphere and a favorable conjuncture, more particularly in certain situations which involve a strong social interaction. We use the example of the Producers/Consumers of impoverished pluriactivity to illustrate it.

The informal pluriactivity associates people in the micro-markets in a complex web. This edifice demands collective organizations: micro-markets, sharing of tasks (notably in construction), reciprocal benevolence. This could also be the rights of redistribution, in a solvent society, but poverty is such that it drives the population to social interaction based on pluriactivity.

With pluriactivity, income is doubled in rural areas in Burundi (F.R.Mahieu et al., 1992); this activity supplies a supplement of cash (70% of the latest banknote of 1000Fbu come from this activity). It allows thus "to deal with the everyday needs of food, housekeeping and family" (J.P. Hubert, 1994).

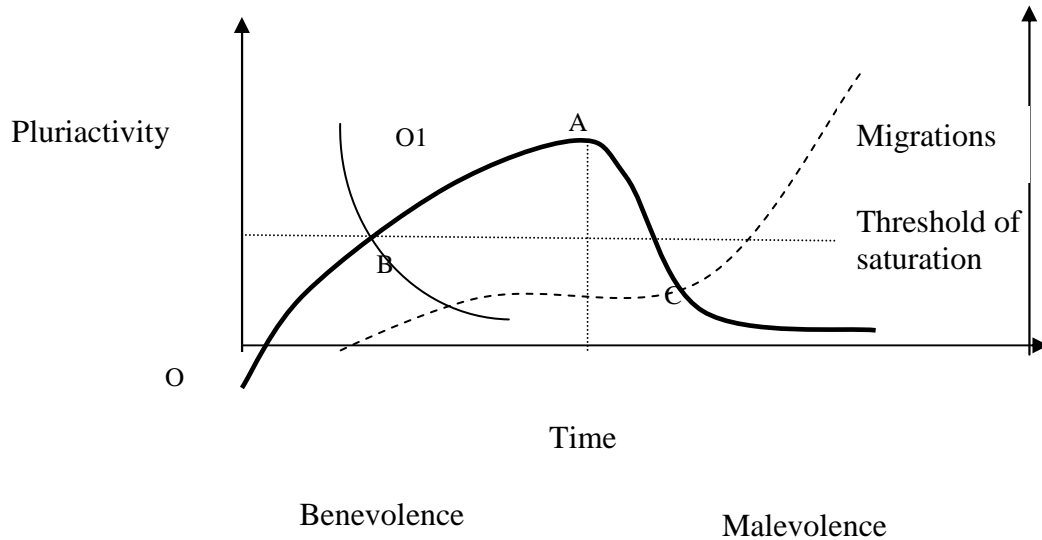
In this framework, impoverished pluriactivity is particularly fragile. The necessity of a pluriactivity implies, in turn, the necessity of a reciprocal benevolence in order to organize the reaction against poverty.

Though the first investigations into pluriactivity in rural areas (F.R.Mahieu et al., 1992; J.P.Hubert, 1993) sketch the modes of life in stable situations, the recompositions in unstable situations remain unknown. Hubert sketches out the idea of a segmentation in rural areas between a core of labor force employed in pluriactivity and a proletarianized fringe; this internal movement in rural areas would contradict the fatalism of the models of rural exodus. Nevertheless, A.Guichaoua insists in his investigations of 1989 into the weak differentiation of rural Burundian society: the impoverished pluriactivity maintains a quite similar living standard among the totality of rural households. The impoverished pluriactivity maintains a hillside in a framework of solidarity.

From a strong demographic pressure, the ratio man/land is critical in mountain agriculture. On one hand it must remain high to allow the achievement of agriculture in terraces; on the other hand, the pressure for land must not pass a critical threshold, or it will lead to an "ethnic re-creation", and therefore a forced exodus.

Initially (figure 3), the pluriactivity (expressed in quantities produced) develops on a benevolent base. This condition an activity founded on a close proximity and confidence just until a stage O1 of collective obligations. With the development of the activity, benevolence decreases when the saturation of work and available land is reached, and migration becomes indispensable. In this configuration the producer/consumer dynamics no longer allows the progression of needs to be satisfied. At a third stage, a fall in activities causes growing impoverishment and a behavior increasingly malevolent. In the end, a migration is sustained by itself, once fear appears and conflicts develop.

Figure 3. Phases of pluriactivity



Such a diagram corresponds roughly to the situation of Burundi after its entry into a period of structural adjustment, in 1987. *A priori*, the collective obligations assure survival by an informal pluriactivity up to point B even though the ratio man/land is very unfavorable⁴. The international organizations impose very labor intensive crops (tea, arabica coffee) and therefore the threshold of saturation is surpassed. Some results are obtained up until point A (1991 - 1992) and migration begins to increase towards poor zones, for example towards the frontier of Tanzania. In 1993, the situation is characterized by an important decrease in production, a growing malevolence which finishes in major conflicts (100 000 civilians killed in 1993) and a migratory panic (500 000 displaced people).

4. Conclusion

Malevolence is not fatally cultural, inherent in the "fragmentation" of human society through race or class, subject to anthropological prejudices. It can be analyzed in a totally different manner at the center of the economic theory. To do this, we distinguish between psychology and behavior of individuals.

⁴ The ratio density of the population/used agricultural surface can reach, in certain regions, 800 inhabitants per square kilometer.

In economic calculations, the internalization of malevolence, for the same reason as for benevolence, plays an important role. It allows the economic analysis of current phenomena of conflict, cheating, or others still more unusual or dramatic such as the ethnic conflicts and genocide.

Malevolence becomes in this last case very rational. If it happens that the utility of one or more people becomes greater as the utility of others diminishes, then a monstrous utilitarianism may be put into place, making the "final solution", a rational and radical method. The genocides, whether Armenian, nazi, Bosnian, or Rwandan, have shown evidence of a methodical organization designed to have the maxim efficiency in bringing about the annihilation of a people.

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