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## *The Social Contract and Social Contraction*

### *The Guilt-Debt Contract*

In explaining how men should give up their sovereign power to the government out of self-interest and self-defense against mutual and external annihilation, Thomas Hobbes states:

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another . . . is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, into one will. . . . This is more than consent or concord; it is a real unity of them all . . . made by covenant of every man with every man in such a manner, as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up right of governing myself, to this man or this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him. . . . For by this authority given to him by every particular man . . . he hath the use of so much power and strength . . . that by terror thereof, he is enabled to perform the will of them all. (1969: 176, 177)

Hobbes' formulation suggests that the "common power," the "real unity," that gives the government or a governor the power "to defend them all" is *stronger* than the power each individual member of society may possess. Paradoxically, it is produced by each one "giving up" his right through the contracting and reduction process in the strength of separate individuals. Hence, a social contract achieved through a society's mutual *contraction* reduces the possibility of individuals' *counteraction*.

Hobbes' social contract theory was apparently used as a convenient bedrock doctrine for the rational-egoistic *Weltanschauung* that the Protestant theosophy promulgated in Europe during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, and consequently it was interpreted in utilitarian ego-centric *Zeitgeist* terms. In the resultant picture of Hobbes' man, people

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saw his "lonely wolf" rather than his collective "Leviathan." The latter was seen to be motivated solely by a material "guilt-debt," an "I or thou" conception of society, and not by an "I and thou" approach to interpersonal relationships.

By the "guilt-debt" conception, I am referring to Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's (1969) use of contractual-guilt. The ethical term "guilt" (which in German is *Schuld*) took its origin from the material concept of "debts" (*Schulden*), and thus interpersonal guilt, according to Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, is based on the contractual notion that someone "owes" something to another (*ist schuldig*). For Nietzsche and Heidegger, as for most other "man-centered" philosophers associated with the Protestant school of German idealism, interpersonal guilt is hence featured by mere material contractual universalistic and instrumental relationships between people. Accordingly, salvation from "guilt" is not an interpersonal matter, but a personal, ego-centered process associated with intrapsychic sin, to be reached when concerned only for oneself. Thus, if salvation is sought through ego-centric achievements, interpersonal relationships can be conceived only in material contractual terms. In such relationships, the weak, deviant "debtor" will always remain beholden to the strong creditor, since it is not in the latter's interest to reduce his strength or to contract himself in order to create a contract of selves. As a result, the gap of natural inequality inevitably widens.

Thus, in guilt-debt relationships, if the other does not repay something equivalent to what he owes me, all the rules of indebtedness apply to him. I can then degrade him, oppress him, increase his guilt feelings, and even enslave him (see Mauss 1954) and thus also inevitably increase his resentment of me, since "each to his own" salvation predominates. This seems to be how the Protestant individualistic doctrine of salvation has made its second coming under the disguised secularized garment of philosophical anthropology. Immanuel Kant interpreted the Protestant individualist inner court of conscience into an individualistic salvation doctrine of moral cognition: Nietzsche preached salvation (from the need for salvation) through one's egoistic will to power; Heidegger spoke of a solitary man who can communicate only with himself; and Søren Kierkegaard's "Single One" stands alone before God. Thus, in sailing under the flag of a new humanistic "self-salvation army," which in "rejecting the idea of salvation . . . replaced it by a kind of self-affirmation" (see Tillich 1965: 19), man finds himself in desperate loneliness. And hence, argues Buber (1967), with this increasing solitary image of man "each solitude is colder and stricter than the preceding, and salvation from it more difficult" (p. 167).

This "I or thou" approach to salvation, in which the strong creditor does not contract his strength to meet the other, has also—as I have pointed out elsewhere (Rotenberg 1978)—laid the groundwork for a long tradition of self-indulging salvation-psychotherapy.

The alternative, the alter-centered theory of “reciprocal-contraction,” requires that a differentiation be made between its two major components: (1) the structural nonutilitarian *contractual* nature of alter-centered salvation; and (2) the functional *contractional* nature of alter-centered salvation. Since utilitarianism has been traditionally used to refer to ego-centered motivation and functionalism to group conditions, I am referring by a nonutilitarian contractual relationship to social contracts between people that require each partner to give something or to do something for his salvation that is not directly utilitarian for himself. Consequently, in the functional contractional relationships, which are a result of the nonutilitarian contract, theoretically no side in the contract can become a strong creditor or a weak debtor, for each partner must contract himself in relation to the other in order to make the salvation-contract possible. The resultant contractional relationship becomes utilitarian for each side, because it is functional for mutual survival and for the maintenance of the social system since there is no widening gap to disrupt these relationships.

### *The Issachar and Zebulun Contract*

The ancient sociological exchange system of the nonutilitarian alter-centric salvation pattern, which emanated from the biblical-tribal “Issachar and Zebulun” model (referring especially to its neo-Hasidic “matter and form” formulation), will be used here as a paradigmatic case to explicate and elucidate sociological (alter-centered) contraction. The most successful succinct description of the Issachar and Zebulun contract emanating from mutual contraction is to be found in a short story by the Nobel Prize winning author, Shumel Yosef Agnon:

When Issachar came to take up his place in paradise . . . they said to him: Issachar, in the world from which you came, from whence was your livelihood? Did he say to them: I had a brother and Zebulun was his name, and he made a partnership with me. He sits on the seashore and sails with merchandise and earns and gives into my mouth and I sit and study the Torah. Did they say to him: if so your Torah was Zebulun’s because if Zebulun would not have engaged in trading you would not study the Torah, and you consumed your paradise during your lifetime. . . . Said Zebulun: all the goodness which I received came to me only due to Issachar my brother who studied the Torah, it follows that it was not me who supported Issachar but Issachar supported me, and now I shall take his place in paradise? . . . Zebulun did not return to his place in paradise due to Issachar’s sorrow and Issachar did not enter instead because of his love for Zebulun. Said the Almighty: Issachar and Zebulun you contracted yourself each for the other. . . . I shall expand your place.

At this hour Zebulun's lot in paradise expanded and space was found also for Issachar. And to this day Issachar and Zebulun sit in paradise and study the Torah alike, and enjoy the divine light, and the Almighty bestows his honor upon them. Since Zebulun supported Issachar and Issachar supported Zebulun's destiny, the Almighty bestowed his honor upon both. (Agnon 1959: 35, 36)

Agnon captured the two essential components of contractual alter-centered salvation. Not only is one's salvation realized through doing for or sharing with the other, but salvation through the other is reciprocally uneven and materially nonutilitarian. The recipient or debtor does not have to return to the creditor whatever he received, but he must accomplish something else, which indirectly and independent from this uneven reciprocity benefits the creditor. Hence there is neither equality nor inequality, because the salvation-actualization efforts of the two partners are not comparable; consequently, there is also no guilt-debt relationship. Issachar's actualization depends on his studying the Torah for himself and for Zebulun, independent of the latter's support or gratitude; Zebulun's salvation depends on his supporting Issachar, although the latter has no material debts in relation to the former.

In his analysis of gift-exchange systems in various primitive tribes, Malinowski (1961) describes a somewhat similar commercial exchange system termed *kula*, according to which arm shells and necklaces are passed around in a sort of circular movement from west to east and from east to west respectively, and consequently the receivers do not have to return something equivalent to the givers. In the *kula* trade system this circular exchange movement is, however, but one aspect of exchange, based on the principle of obligatory equivalent returns between creditors and debtors.

Nonetheless, an asymmetric exchange system most closely akin to the Issachar and Zebulun contract can be found among the Brahmins (see Mauss 1954), who solicit and receive gifts but make their return wholly by religious services. Here the exchange is so structured that in order not to lose his superiority and to prevent the danger of dependent guilt-debt relationships, this caste pretends to refuse gifts and "then compromises and accepts only those which are given spontaneously [because] the bond that the gift creates between the donor and the recipient is too strong for them" (see Mauss 1954: 58).

While a proper discussion doing justice to the elaborated theories coming out of the sociological exchange school is beyond the scope of the present narrow contraction perspective, I should nonetheless mention that while giving and receiving in social systems of kinship<sup>1</sup> or friendship is instrumental and direct, it is nonetheless essentially unconditional and, consequently, at times unilateral. Unilateral reciprocity in such cases might

still eschew socially dysfunctional guilt-debt relationships, although it is unequivocal in that it does not require or facilitate equivalent repayment, at least in the case of offspring, in relation to their parents (see Eisenstadt 1971). It should be stressed further that, while typical patron-client relationship exchange is usually structurally unequal or unconditional, exchange in such systems is nonetheless anchored in hierarchical class stratification and power differentiation (see Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980),<sup>2</sup> which is markedly unlike the Issachar and Zebulun equal status exchange model.

Most interesting here is also the case of Japan, where interpersonal dependent relationships based on the notion of *amae* (see Doi 1973) are fostered as regulative mechanisms of social control and where, accordingly, return of a debt means cutting off relationships, while the nonreturn of a debt connotes friendship, trust, and eternal gratitude.

In discussing what can be termed the “structural-functional” mechanisms of interpersonal dependence in Japan, Doi (1973: 88) quotes an episode from a story by Natsume Soseki:

I once borrowed three yen from Kiyo. Five years have gone by but I still haven't returned it. Not that I can't, I just don't! . . . and I've no intention of feeling an obligation to return it immediately, as though she was a stranger. It would be as though I didn't take her kindness at its face value—like finding fault with the goodness of her heart . . . to accept a favor from one who's not one of your own people and to do nothing about returning it is doing him a favor, because it means you're treating him like somebody who matters to you. If you pay your own share, the matter ends there . . . To have a feeling of gratitude inside for a favor done you—that's the kind of repayment no money can repay.

Although one might wonder whether the feeling of gratitude might not be as enslaving as the Western guilt-debt relationship, especially when borrowing is unilateral, this case is cross-culturally illuminative.

For the sake of analytical consistency, a conceptual differentiation between sociological and psychological contraction must be made here. Sociological alter-centric contraction means that the cultural system offers several ideal labels or types for salvation (e.g., Issachar, Zebulun, and/or others) which because of their equal status as idealized goals for salvation and their alter-centric prescriptive salvation norms, have to be contracted to facilitate the coexistence of multiple salvation-actualization systems. Psychological contraction refers to interactive behavioral norms prescribing how people should contract their selves in relation to other people or in relation to various mental states within themselves. Sociological alter-centered contraction can be understood by studying structural relationships between various salvation systems, such as those disseminated by the Issachar and

Zebulun contract. Psychological alter-centric contraction can be understood by examining the dynamics of intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior norms prescribed by Hasidic ethics.

As I shall demonstrate, however, the Hasidic behavioral ethics did not develop in a vacuum, but seem to have drawn heavily on the Issachar and Zebulun alter-centered contraction perspective.

### *The Ideological-Historical Roots of the Issachar and Zebulun Model*

To understand how the Hasidic neo-Issachar and Zebulun model emerged, we must at this point examine briefly the socio-historic origins of the Issachar and Zebulun alter-centered contract. The earliest sources concerning the Issachar and Zebulun contract are the legends and commentary that evolved around the biblical descriptions of these two tribal brothers. The first elements of the legend were based on Jacob's blessings to his sons in Genesis and on Moses' blessings of the tribes in Deuteronomy: "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be an haven of ships . . . Issachar is a strong ass crouching down between two burdens" (Gen. 49:13-14); and "of Zebulun he said, 'Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents' " (Deut. 33:18).

In the Talmudic period (specifically from the second to fifth centuries A.D.) Zebulun was described as a merchant, and Issachar's burden and tents were described as the burden and tents of Torah. Moreover, the fact that Zebulun was mentioned first in both blessings, although he was younger than Issachar, gave birth to the famous interpretation used also by Agnon that Zebulun and Issachar made a partnership. Zebulun dwells at the haven of the sea and goes out sailing with his merchandise and earns and gives into the mouth of Issachar, who sits and studies the Torah.<sup>3</sup> And therefore Zebulun came before Issachar since Issachar's Torah was due to Zebulun (Rashi, Deut. 33:18). From a historical point of view it is of interest to stress that in spite of some evidence indicating that Zebulun was indeed a sea merchant and Issachar a Talmudist and a judge, it was in fact a legend, gradually transformed into an ideology, which was also eventually translated into a contractual and contractional tradition instructing the rich (not necessarily Zebulunian sea merchants) to purchase their salvation by supporting poor Talmudic scholars (see Beer 1968).

We should differentiate between the two important exchange systems that followed from this tradition. The predominant pattern was the straightforward tradition of alter-centered salvation in which Zebulun the merchant supports Issachar the scholar. Although here the ideal model for self-actualization was studying the Torah, Zebulun's alter-centered salvation seems to have reached a higher level than Issachar's because he was mentioned first in the biblical blessings. The second pattern seems to have insti-

tutionalized an exchange system of trading and arbitration. According to this tradition, Issachar divided his time between cultivating his land and studying Torah, while Zebulun only exported Issachar's products and imported the goods Issachar needed from abroad. While the alter-centered salvation motif is preserved in both systems, the first case contains a negative-parasitic element, which I shall address later, and the second system bears the seeds of the unique interpersonal and economic exchange that subsequently developed.

Indeed, for a time there seems to have been a certain struggle between these two alter-centered salvation systems, which was reflected in the ideologies expressed by early (second to third century) and later (third to fifth century) Talmudic scholars. The historian Beer (1968) describes a case of a Talmudic law that was cited in the name of a person named Azarya only because he was a merchant who supported his brother Rabbi Shimon (see Rashi, Talmud, *Zevachim* 2:1). On the other hand, it is said that the famous Talmudist Hillel refused to be supported by his brother Shevna, a rich merchant. This implies that Hillel favored the second system and hence advocated that scholars should both work and study (see Talmud, *Sota* 21:1). In general, maintains Beer (1968), although there is some available evidence from Talmudic preachings that members of the Issachar tribe either rented out their fields in order to free themselves for study or divided their time between study and self-supporting labor (and hence only used Zebulun's marketing services), in fact the rabbis gradually began to demand in their public preachings that the Talmudists (i.e., the Issachars) should devote their entire time to studies and that the merchants (i.e., the Zebuluns) should support them completely. Thus the Talmudists who lived from the second to the fifth centuries institutionalized the Issachar and Zebulun contract through the tradition of public appeals and the formation of welfare organizations in order to support poor scholars. What appears most significant, according to Beer, is that leading solicitors such as "Rabbi Hiyya Bar Abba made Zebulun the supporter of Issachar the scholar. The Israeli and Babylonian Amoraim [Talmudists from the third to fifth centuries] learned from him, and so did the preachers and biblical commentators throughout the ages" (1968: 180).

To lead the reader directly to our major paradigmatic case study, it would be useful to skip now from the Talmudic period to the eighteenth-century Hasidic culture, in order to demonstrate how the Issachar and Zebulun model was revived in Hasidic spiritual-material terms as a neo-Issacharian-Zebulunian alter-centered contraction model.

### *The People of Form and the People of Matter*

The key concepts here are "people of matter" and "people of form." They were introduced by Rabbi Yaacov Yosef of Polony, who was the Besht's

contemporary and literary disciple and who laid the groundwork for the Hasidic philosophy by interpreting the Besht's doctrine in biblical commentary and books.

According to the Hasidic monistic conception of man, earthly physical matters (*chomer*) can and must be converted into spiritual forms (*tzura*). The functional relationship between "form" and "matter" assumes that one is impossible without the other, on both the intrapsychic and the interpersonal levels (see Dresner 1960). Thus, in Hasidic literature the terms "form" and "matter" are used to refer to psychological states within people (with which I shall deal separately), to "people of form" (*anshey tzura*), who have presumably reached a high level of spirituality, and to "people of matter" (*anshey chomer*), the ordinary masses who live in the earthly, material world.

According to Rabbi Yaacov Yosef (1963), early Hasidim used the doctrine of "form" and "matter" strictly to reestablish the alter-centered contractual relationship that prevailed between Issachar and Zebulun (see Nigal 1974). Thus, in approaching the rich "people of matter" the early Hasidic leaders emphasized that it is functional for the salvation of the rich to support the "people of form" (referring to the old-style Talmudic scholars), because through their cleavage to the "people of form," so they too will be uplifted and redeemed. Moreover, these early Hasidic leaders stressed that this system of mutual help is functional for the maintenance and survival of the entire community, as the "people of form" have a moral influence on the "people of matter," and the latter reciprocate by bestowing material goodness upon the former (see Nigal 1974: 28).

The structural-functional organic relationship between the "people of form" and the "people of matter" is then extended by Rabbi Yaacov Yosef and other Hasidic leaders to the sphere of adhesion and prayers, which epitomized Hasidic alter-centered salvation. Functional system maintenance on a horizontal level is portrayed in terms of functional organic interdependence between the "people of form" and the "people of matter." The prayers of the "people of form" are spiritual; they constitute the nation's soul and bestow spirituality on the "people of matter." The prayers of the "people of matter" are intended to maintain or supply the material needs for themselves and for the "people of form"; hence, the "people of matter" constitute the nation's body. Thus, a horizontal structure of "organic solidarity" is created, for the soul cannot exist without the body, and the body cannot exist without the soul (see *Toldot*, Rabbi Yaacov Yosef 1963: 269). Elsewhere, Rabbi Yaacov Yosef portrays the "people of matter" as the feet of the congregation and the "people of form" as its eyes. This description gives the organic interdependence of these two "peoples" a most dynamic dimension, for when the feet are low, the head is also inevitably bent (see Nigal 1974: 24).



Thus theoretically Yaacov Yosef's organic solidarity, or rather organic interdependence, model refers not merely to what may be pictured as a vertical Durkheimian or Parsonian universalistic, affectively neutral interdependence but to a horizontal structural status equality that should consequently prevail between Issacharian form and Zebulunian matter on the interpersonal and the intrapersonal levels. Hence, stresses Rabbi Yaacov Yosef (1963: 243),

Since similar to the individuality within one person, the soul and form is not to feel superior over the body and say that it is a holy soul, . . . and even more so the body is not to be arrogant over the soul as it holds the soul, . . . as they need each other like a man and a woman, each one being half a body. So it is in the collective, the Talmudic scholars and righteous are not to say that there is no need in the masses, since they support the Torah, . . . and even more so the masses are not to say that there is no need for Talmudic scholars, or to feel arrogant against them since their livelihood is due to them, . . . and so, each one is half and with both together, matter and form whether in the collective or within the individual, it becomes one full person.

Thus, the Issachar and Zebulun monistic alter-centered contraction model was reconstructed in Hasidic matter-and-form terminology.

In summing up the introduction of the sociological "matter and form" paradigm, which for purposes of convenience and historical consistency will hereafter be termed the "Issachar and Zebulun" or material-spiritual contractional model, there emerge two sociological patterns that call for some socio-historical illustrative verification. These patterns, which are today by no means exclusively Jewish, are: (1) The interactive "alter-centered salvation" pattern (i.e., actualizing salvation through the contracted other) and (2) The structural "multiple ideal labels" dimension (facilitating actualization through multiple alternative social ideals).

Although the interpersonal "alter-centered salvation" exchange pattern and the "multiple ideal labels" structural dimension are interrelated (because it is the very contraction of the material ideal label Zebulun in relation to the spiritual ideal label Issachar which creates the organic alter-centered actualization system), I shall deal with these patterns separately after the following general introductory statements.

From a general socio-historical perspective, the Jewish congregational tradition of organizing welfare institutions and forming economic exchange patterns such as banking and trading, as well as the tendency to identify with messianic and utopian-socialistic movements, can be traced to the contractional alter-centered salvation norm.

Although the idea of salvation in Judaism is quite complex, as we shall later see, in relation to the first pattern Scholem (1972: 1) states that while

generally “Christianity conceives of redemption as an event . . . which is reflected in the soul, in the private world of each individual, and which effects an inner transformation . . . the Jewish categories of redemption, is a community.” Similarly, Buber (1958a) maintains that while preoccupation with one’s own salvation is the highest aim in Protestantism, in Judaism one is redeemed only through the other “thous” in the community to whom one is responsible and who are responsible for him. Hence, such Talmudic imperatives as “One who solicits mercy for his fellow while he himself is in need of the same thing will be answered first” (Talmud, *Baba Kama* 92a) or “All Israel are sureties<sup>4</sup> one for another” (Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a) have featured the Jewish communal welfare system for many generations.

In Mahayana Buddhism, where salvation or freedom is attained by obtaining knowledge and enlightenment (*bodhi*), salvation is similarly alter-centered in that the knowledge (*bodhi-sattva*) that one acquires is for all beings and not for oneself (see Ishizu 1970). But in this case there is only one salvation goal, and alter-centrism does not lead to an interactive, this-world activism (see Murti 1970). In general, however, it must already be pointed out here that alter-centered salvation may be, as we shall see later, functional or dysfunctional for the maintenance of the social system.

In alter-centered cultures, with a multiple, contracted ideal-labeling system, people must contract themselves in relation to others, because there is more than one yardstick to measure actualization or salvation. The Besht’s (1975b: 17) systematic use of the biblical verse “In all thy ways know Him” (Prov. 3:6) may represent a typical multiple actualization ideal that corresponds behaviorally to the Issachar and Zebulun structural multiple ideal-labeling dimension.<sup>5</sup> In cultures predominated by only one, non-contracted salvation goal, which I term the “mono ideal label” system (e.g., the Protestant “superman” or “supermaterialist”), inequality is inevitably perpetuated. Since by law of nature not all people are equally endowed to be intellectually or materially successful, interaction is regulated by guilt-debt relationships, and this increases the probability of widening social gaps and ratios of deviance, because the less endowed “debtor” will always “owe” something to the stronger creditor. This seemed to have been Blau’s (1975) point of departure from Homans’ (1961) utilitarian, ego-centric, and consequently guilt-debt oriented exchange theory. While Homans insisted that the course of human action is motivated by people’s self-interested maximizations of returns and minimization of losses, Blau admitted that the natural differences in the amount of talent, resources, and power that exchange partners possess create social imbalances that widen the gap between the deprived debtor and his selfish, crediting exchange partner. Our model intends to expose the futility of the *equality* myth by the apparent *utility* of a

social structure with multiple ideal labels as it differentiates between multiple *roads* to salvation and multiple *modes* of salvation.

Because the sociological examination of the functionality or dysfunctionality of the alter-centered salvation pattern in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of the general social system is deeply embedded in the problem of altruism (i.e., degree of instrumentality in interpersonal relationships), we may begin our analysis of the first pattern by contrasting alterism with altruism.

#### NOTES

1. It is of interest that typical Western exchange theorists (see Burns 1977) regard husband-wife exchange as unequal mainly because the wife does not repay in equivalent material productivity matching that of the husband and is for that reason considered to be in a subordinate position.
2. It may be noted in a similar fashion that while Blau's (1964) imbalanced exchange category may at times be functional, as in the case where subordinates receive benefits and protection, inequality and social gaps are still maintained in such relationships because of the imbalanced power, although exploitation and oppression are not immanent. Similarly, the "asymmetrical exchange" among Hindus and other South Asian cultures described by Marriott (1976: 112) is used mostly as a basis for social differentiation and power rankings, whereby "those who give are to be recognized as differing from and standing in rank, power and quality . . . above those who take."
3. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (135–104 B.C.) Zebulun is said to have told his sons, "I saw a man in distress through nakedness in wintertime, and had compassion upon him, and stole away a garment secretly from my father's house, and gave it to him" (see Charles 1917: 69). Here Zebulun's alter-centered salvation might be the first description of "Robin-Hoodism."
4. The Maggid of Mezeritz (1927: 63), one of the Besht's two major disciples, has said that the Hebrew word *arevim* (sureties, responsible) should be read *meoravim*, "intermingled."
5. The Talmudic parallel to the multiple-actualization ideal-labeling principle is the notion of "these and those are God's living words" (*Gitin* 6:2), which stands for the principle of legitimizing the diversity of legal opinions.