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## SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT ETHICAL RATIONALITY

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Ethical rationality presupposes a conception of what man ought to be, of the orientation of his historical evolution and of the type of society in which this orientation is likely to be realised. In order to define the content of ethical rationality we have to start from such a conception, i.e. from a normative anthropology and from a normative social philosophy. And here lies the main problem about ethical rationality.

Such a normative anthropology and social philosophy cannot logically be derived from the social sciences and from the sciences of man. These sciences describe, systematize and explain the known or the existing realities. They don't determine the ways in which man ought to realize himself: how to value and how to orient his existence and his actions, how to further his evolution towards a fuller humanity, how to create new existential conditions out of the existing possibilities?

To answer these questions we need not only scientific data and scientific theories but also some fundamental value choices. Science cannot prescribe such fundamental value choices. It can give us the information we need in order to evaluate the conditions, implications and consequences of alternative value choices and in order to check their factual premisses. But it cannot possibly argue on convincing grounds that we ought to accept one such fundamental value choice to the exclusion of all others.

Fundamental value choices are always open to contestation, to debate, to discussion. A general consensus or unanimity isn't available. They cannot be said to be *objective* or *generally valid*. E.g., it is impossible to demonstrate that everyone ought to accept the ideal or the value of social justice and solidarity. Max WEBER and his disciples in social science concluded from this that values, ideals and ultimate ends of actions are beyond the scope of rationality, and that

they belong to the realm of the irrational preferences of human beings which do not lend themselves to rational discussion or validation.

The logical positivists argued for this view by pointing out that value judgments are meaningless from a cognitive (epistemological or methodological) standpoint, and that meaningless judgments are not judgments at all because they can neither be verified nor falsified.

The emotivists and prescriptivists in ethical theory assumed, in line with this logical positivist view, that moral value judgments are reducible to subjective expressions of emotion, preference or will. They are symptomatic of the feelings and the will of the valuating person and they function as means of persuading others to feel or to act in line with the feelings and the will of the valuating person, but as persuasive communications and action incentives they are beyond the scope of rational discussion and validation.

I think this subjectivist view on value judgments to be defensible, if one takes a *psychological* or an *epistemological* starting point. Individuals and groups clearly adopt values, ideals and ends on the basis of irrational and even unconscious motives. Contingent factors such as education, social environment, cultural influences and individual personality traits *determine* people in the adoption or the rejection of certain sets of values, ideals and ends. Rational deliberation and decision play only a minor role in the determination of the beliefs and attitudes of most people.

As far as this is meant, Weber is right in saying that the choice of values, standards, ideals and ultimate ends is a matter of irrationality.

Furthermore, it is clearly true that value judgments are indeed the expression of an individual's feelings towards the objects of those value judgments. As it is clearly true that such expressions sociopsychologically function as persuasive communications and as action-incentives, directed towards other people. When I call the American intervention in South-East-Asia a "reprehensible" or "horrible" violation of the people's right of self-determination, and when I therefore "disapprove" of it, I am undoubtedly expressing my negative "feeling" against acts of violation of a state of affairs towards which I have positive "feelings" e.g. a world order which allows for self-determination of all peoples. In communicating these feelings to others, whatever the grammatical form or the logical structure of my utterance may be, I am trying to bring about an attitude change or a behavioral change in the public to which I am addressing my self.

Emotivists and prescriptivists in ethical theory are right in pointing to the functions of attitude change and of behavioral change which

are characteristic for moral value judgments.

Weber and the emotivists and prescriptivists in ethical theory discussed the problem of values, ideals and ultimate action goals on the *psychological level*: the level of the motives for adoption or rejection of values (etc.), and the level of the expressive and communicative functions of value judgments.

I agree with them in stating that on this psychological level the concept of ethical rationality is an undefinable one. The adoption or rejection of values and the meaning and communicative functions of value utterances are dependent on the psychological characteristics and the social interactions of the individual. In this sense they are subjective, personal, arbitrary or irrational.

Ethical subjectivism or ethical irrationalism is inspired by the analysis of the psychological determinants or mechanisms that govern the adoption or rejection, the expression and the persuasive functions of values and value judgments.

Logical positivism denies the rationality of value judgments with the argument of their cognitive meaninglessness. Expressions or utterances which are cognitively meaningless may be of great social or psychological relevance, but they cannot be called "rational" because of the lack of any method of verification, corroboration or falsification.

This approach has been useful in so far as it shed some light on the distinctive features of descriptive judgments and value judgments, and as far as it made clear that both kinds of judgments raise different problems with respect to confirmation and falsification.

Descriptive judgments are cognitively meaningful if there is a method which allows for their corroboration or their falsification. According to the formulation of the criterion this means that descriptive judgments can be said to be "true" or "false", if they can be verified or corroborated or confirmed, or falsified by some kind of observation or experiment.

Value judgments cannot. They are not descriptive. They cannot be said to be "true" or "false"; they are simply meaningless. Whether we accept or reject them is irrelevant from a cognitive point of view, because it makes no difference for our cognitive mapping of the world whether we accept or reject them. They cannot be true or false, because they say nothing about the world. They are only expressions of our subjective appreciation or valuation of the world. And subjective appreciation or valuation is not a matter for rational validation.

Now, it is clear that this view of the irrational character of value judgments depends entirely on the acceptance of the logical

positivists' criterion of meaning. This criterion is a cognitive one. It restricts the possibility of validation of judgments to the availability of observational or experimental means of testing. Given the acceptance of this criterion, value judgments are indeed meaningless. If one accepts then as next step the identification of "rationality" with "cognitive meaningfulness", then all moral value judgments appear inevitably as "irrational". However, the question is whether we are prepared to accept this identification. For the logical positivists value judgments are irrational because they start exclusively from epistemological and methodological criteria of rationality.

In my opinion, there is no convincing argument why this restriction of rationality should be accepted. It does not follow from the analyses made by the logical positivists. It is an aprioristic and normative premiss which is not in itself justified by their criteria of meaning, but which is its presupposition.

Ethical subjectivism or ethical irrationalism is - as already said - inspired by a psychological and an epistemological approach to value judgments. On these levels it has had its merits and yielded some useful insights. But it did not demonstrate that these approaches are the only valuable or possible ones, and, consequently, that other approaches could not possibly refute subjectivism or irrationalism.

In my opinion as I mentioned already, the search for ethical rationality must start from an anthropological point of view and from a view on the cultural evolution of humanity, which implies the acceptance of some fundamental value choices.

The crucial problem then is whether value choices could ever be called "rational", or whether all such choices are equally arbitrary or irrational.

It is clear that this problem cannot be solved by simply asserting — in an apodictic manner — the "rational" character of any set of values. Such an act of assertion would in itself be a bare manifestation of irrationality. If we claim "rationality" for specific values we have to specify a method of rational validation or legitimation which allows us to do so. And this implies that we do not only specify such a method, but that we propose some good arguments why we should call it "rational". The problem then can be formulated as follows

- (1) Is it possible to validate or to legitimise a specific set of values by demonstrating their desirability or their necessity for the realisation of a normative conception of man and his future ?
- (2) And is there a sense of "rationality" in which that normative conception could be said to be "rational" ?

In the next pages I shall make an attempt to answer these questions.

This approach does not imply that the search for ethical rationality is a search for ABSOLUTE values or CATEGORICAL imperatives. I am not an ethical absolutist. I do not believe in the existence of eternal, unquestionable values and imperatives. On the contrary, I am firmly convinced that ethical absolutism is rooted in the irrational desire to eternalize and to universalize one's own subjective or social values. The search for ethical rationality is the search for CONDITIONAL values or HYPOTHETICAL imperatives, i.e. values or imperatives which are validated by the purpose they serve. The question of why we should accept a specific set of such conditional values has to be answered by giving reasons why we should consider that purpose as a "rational" one. Consequently, our main problem consists in demonstrating why a specific conception of man and his evolution should be preferred over others.

As a base for the choice and validation of rational moral values I would like to propose the following starting points.

(1) *Analysis of the necessary conditions of human existence on the individual, the social and the planetary level.*

When we engage ourselves in the search for a rational morality we may, indeed, neglect the positions of those who might deny the desirability of minimal conditions of human existence or the desirability of continuing this existence, because they are putting themselves out of the realm within which ethical thinking and arguing is relevant.

If we wish to exist and to survive as human beings we have to adopt an attitude of positive valuation towards the objective requirements for existence and survival.

To these requirements belongs the satisfaction of the primary needs of all human beings, as far as this is economically and technically possible, and the further development and adaptation of the economic and technical means to make that satisfaction possible. These needs are of biological, psychological, social and cultural nature. Their satisfaction is a necessary condition for human existence as such. People should have adequate food, from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view. There has to be clothing and housing accomodation for everyone. Physical, mental and environmental health, as well as opportunities for creative activities and for recuperation and creative leisure, are requirements for the wellbeing and normal functioning of human beings. Some kind of

social, economic and affective stability and security is indispensable for the minimal well-functioning of human beings. Education and instruction should be given to all people, because of the fact that enculturation and transmission of culture are the basis of the existence of man as a cultural, social and historical being.

If we accept all these as basic needs of humanity, then we have to accept them as normative incentives for a rational morality. The organisation of the satisfaction of these needs has to be the primary goal of rational morality. Science can help us in finding the appropriate technical means and economic, social, cultural and political structures and institutions that would allow us to bring about their *optimal* satisfaction.

Scientific information can lead to increasing agreement about what must be considered basic conditions for *good* or *optimal* food, protection against natural dangers, physical and mental health, environmental care, housing and living accommodations, creative human activity, leisure and recreation, social and affective security, education and instruction, and so on.

The optimization of the satisfaction of these needs requires knowledge of their nature and of the available technical means. But it requires also an increasing insight into the patterns of economic, social and political organisation which are likely to further this optimization. Groups, societies and humanity as a whole have to be organized economically, socially and politically in such a way as to render possible the needs satisfaction and the intellectual, affective and social wellfunctioning of all people alike.

This means that ethical reationality is inevitably linked with economic, social and political consequences. A rational morality has to face the problem of how satisfaction of human needs and minimal conditions of intellectual, affective and social well-functioning could be brought about and organized in a manner that harmonizes the needs satisfaction of a plurality of individuals, groups and societies.

The social and behavioral sciences should contribute to our insight into the patterns of organisation that would allow us to make progress in that direction.

At this level I could define ethical rationality as the attempt to develop strategies and tactics for the realization of satisfying conditions of human existence for all people, starting from an analysis of primary human needs and of the historically available means for their satisfaction.

(2) *Analysis of the possibilities for further human evolution or development.*

This rationality, however, is still a very restricted one, although I am fully aware of the intricate problems that even at this level may arise with the concrete elaboration of it, especially concerning the concrete delimitation of the concept of *primary*, or *basic* or *fundamental human needs* and concerning the *criteria* for *minimal well-functioning* of human beings. However, most controversial issues in ethics pertain to problems of value choices on a *higher* level : not the level of *primary conditions* of human existence and survival, but the level of more *sophisticated, derived* or *secondary* needs, drives, goals or ends of human beings.

Is ethical rationality possible on this level ?

As a cultural, social and historical being, man is dynamic, evolutionary or progressive in his needs, drives, goals and ends. He escalates his quality-demands on life, and these demands are in a large part only loosely related to primary needs.

These demands appear to be very different and often antagonistic if we compare different groups, social classes, societies and historical or cultural periods. How, then, could we possibly decide on the rationality or irrationality of the chosen values ? Should we perpetuate our passion for economic growth because of the material goods and comfort it yields, or should we change our orientation and try to ameliorate the conditions for mental health and socialization in our lives ? Which kind of "quality" do we want ? And why should we prefer one kind of quality over another ?

Put in this form, there is no convincing answer to these questions. Human needs and values are in fact historically, culturally and socially *relative*, and if we enumerate them they appear as equally possible choices.

But I think this to be a misleading formulation of the problem. It asks for an *absolute* criterion of rationality that would permit us to evaluate the degree of rationality of the different systems of needs and values that can be registered in history. Such a criterion doesn't exist, and it couldn't possibly exist because each criterion is itself the product of a specific cultural tradition or context.

The quest for ethical rationality cannot be abstracted from the context of human needs, values and possibilities within which this quest is undertaken.

If we ask ourselves which way to take for our further evolution or development, we must inevitably start from the kind of man we are as a product of historical conditioning in our social, economic, cultural and political situation, and we must take into consideration

the factual possibilities and limits of any evolution or progress. We cannot make value-choices as if we were unconditioned, value-free subjects and as if we were not dependent on the existing factual possibilities and limits. Consequently, I would put the question as follows : Given the type of human personality we are (on historical and sociocultural grounds), and given the factual possibilities and limits for further evolution or development, how could we define "ethical rationality" with respect to value-choices for "progress" ? We must start from the fact that man wants more than mere survival and minimal conditions of existence. He defines himself in terms of further evolution, development or progress, whatever the concrete content of these concepts may be.

If we are to define ethical rationality in this respect we have to ask for the objective possibilities and limits for any development, evolution or progress. The analysis of existing possibilities and limits is a primary condition for the determination of the values, ideals, ends we can choose without deviating into utopian dreams and unrealistic moralities.

We have to take into account the level we arrived at in scientific, technological and economic development, because our scientific technological and economic means determine what we *can* strive for and they also determine to a large extent what we *will* strive for. That they determine what we *can* strive for is clear. But they also determine to a large extent what we *will* strive for, for several reasons. Scientific, technological and economic possibilities are means of controlling nature and of organizing individual and social life in ways that satisfy the existing human needs. As soon as these means of controlling and organizing are available they *will* be used in some way or another, because their availability will suggest the possibility of satisfying some as yet unsatisfied needs or will create new needs that could be satisfied by them.

Consequently, if it is true that the development of scientific, technological and economic means depends to a large extent on the existing human needs, the inverse is equally true. Our needs are to a large extent dependent on the available means.

What I intend to say by this is that any conception of further human development or progress has to take into account the human needs that can be satisfied in the given circumstances or that are likely to arise as a consequence of the available means. Otherwise, the proposed morality is likely to be practically irrelevant, and practical relevance may be said to be one of the basic conditions for a rational morality.

In this context it may be assumed that the development of scientific technological and economic means generated a set of secondary needs which are probably irreversible and which therefore have to be built in into a rational morality of further human development: such as the elimination of scarcity with respect to goods and services; some kind of comfort and welfare as means of organizing the 'good' life; furthering attempts at ameliorating physical and mental health care; furthering environment care and ecological equilibrium; some kind of income guarantee and of social security; satisfying housing accommodation; recreation possibilities, and so on.

These examples illustrate what I mean by human needs which resulted from the availability of means for satisfying them and which are likely to be historically irreversible, so that the search for a rational morality has to take them into account. From an "academic" point of view they might be said to be "relative", "questionable" or "irrational", because there is no absolute reference point for justifying them. But this objection is merely academic, because in practice these needs constitute the personality structure we have to face if we are to create a practically useful rational morality. Ethical rationality, I said, presupposes an anthropology, i.e. a conception of specific human needs that ought to be satisfied and of the hierarchy of their satisfaction. Purely theoretically, many such anthropologies are possible. But in practice these possibilities are very restricted by the fact of the historically irreversible needs determination of the people for whom a morality has to be useful. Morality is not a thing for an "abstract" or "absolute" man, but a means for organizing the life of concrete historical beings. Therefore morality cannot be abstracted from men's concrete historical needs structure. But, all we have written until now does not solve the question of how to determine the concrete content of a rational morality. We must start from the acceptance of the necessary conditions of minimal human existence, and we have to take into account the possibilities and limits of further human development and the needs structure of the people for whom rational morality is intended. But this only allows for a restriction of the possible alternatives, in the sense that it confines the domain within which morality could be said to be 'rational'. In other words, it permits us to define some necessary conditions for ethical rationality but it does not permit us to define the sufficient conditions for the determination of the concrete content of ethical rationality. There remain several unanswered questions.

In the first place the question of which needs satisfactions should

be given priority. In the second place the question of which new arising secondary needs should be evaluated positively and furthered and which should be rejected or blocked, and how they should be hierarchised. Which concrete purposes should scientific, technological and economic means serve? What about different and conflicting needs within the needs structure of the individual and between the needs structures of individuals and groups?

It will be clear that these questions cannot be answered once and for all in a dogmatic manner. Ethical rationality cannot consist in defining and enumerating concrete values, standards and ends for all concrete moral problems. The maximum we may hope to achieve is to bring about an increasing consensus on some basic guiding principles for the solution of concrete moral problems. But where can we find such principles? Is there any agreement on their validity? And how could we justify our calling them 'rational'?

*(3) Some guiding principles for the concrete content determination of ethical rationality.*

A morality for the orientation of further human development is a future oriented morality. The course of history, the future of mankind, however, cannot be predicted or dogmatically anticipated. It will depend on the evolution of the available means, on the evolution of human needs in interaction with the evolution of the means, on the irreversible decisions that will be taken as a result of the dynamics of means and needs, and so on. Man is continuously redefining and re-orienting himself throughout the historical process. A static anthropology and a static social philosophy are always falsified by history. How then would ethical rationality be possible if it is to be future-oriented?

The future of mankind depends on man himself and is open to alternatives. But the orientation or direction he takes is conditioned by his infrastructural and superstructural past and heritage. Further human development is restricted and directed by that heritage. On the infrastructural level we pointed already to the fact that the existing scientific, technological and economic means (a) delimit the possibilities of directing further human development, and (b) play an important role in the direction of that development by determining or conditioning new secondary needs in the people that are confronted with their availability. This last factor brings us to the superstructural level. Historical man, faced with the problem of how to orient further human development, is conditioned by a historically grown needs structure and by religious, moral, philosophical and ideological conceptions about the 'good life',

about the kind of humanity we ought to further, about morality itself. Psychologically and 'lebensanschaulich' he takes part in an historical tradition from which he cannot fully abstract himself. Thinking about morality, including the search for rationality in ethics, is practically irrelevant if it leaves out of consideration the moral tradition in which the thinker is embedded or if it treats it as irrelevant.

The concept of "moral tradition", however, is ambiguous. It can be interpreted in at least three ways. The first one would consist in identifying "moral tradition" with the whole range of moral rules, ideals and practices that appeared in history. This is clearly not the sense in which I wish to use the concept in this context. For moral rules, ideals and practices have been very heterogeneous and even antagonistic, and comprised among other things justifications of e.g. slavery, oppression, genocide, holy war, colonialism, imperialism, witch burning, sex repression, discrimination against minorities, etc.

A second interpretation could mean by 'moral tradition' the constant or historically unchanged elements in the variety of moral rules, ideals and practices. This also is not the sense in which I use the concept. For it is not at all clear what those constant elements would be and even whether there are any. If there are any, they are likely to be of such a general and abstract character that their practical usefulness and applicability must tend to zero. Moreover, the fact that some moral rules, ideals or practices remained historically unchanged would not in itself be a good ethical argument for accepting and perpetuating them.

A third interpretation is possible, and is the one I mean. In this interpretation the concept of 'moral tradition' refers to the set of principles, values, rules or ideals we have now come to accept as fundamental and irreversible products of the historical evolution of moral thinking and practice.

Out of the historical interplay of morals with alternative moralities and ideologies, with vested interests and power constellations, with frustrated or new arising human needs and aspirations (etc.), some moral values and principles arose in a spiral movement, and are now to be considered as fundamental or basic, because they seem to be historically irreversible and because they function as indispensable guiding principles for our future oriented value patterns. Those principles have not always been recognized and accepted. They are not a sort of homogeneous cultural heritage. Nor are they generally adopted and applied by all people today. But at the moment they constitute the bulk of moral consciousness that has grown out of a long series of historical conflicts between fundamental human

aspirations and existing economic, social, political and ideological institutions and structures. Western history can be seen as a spiral movement of emancipation struggles. Individuals, groups and collectivities fought against all kinds of institutional and ideological restriction upon their most fundamental human aspirations, and by means of social, economic, political and ideological reforms and revolutions they made steps of progress towards a more satisfying realisation of those aspirations. This emancipatory process was not continuous nor rectilinear. It was broken by periods of stagnation, deviation and even regression. But in a macroscopic view such an emancipatory process appears undeniable. There has been first of all a struggle for recognition of the dignity and the equality of human individuals on the spiritual (metaphysical or psychological) level, followed by a struggle for the realisation of juridical and moral guarantees to protect that dignity and equality. This has led to the ideal of physical, moral and political rights of the individual, to be safeguarded by ethical and legal systems and by political structures. The political and legal realisation of individual freedom and individual rights turned out to be only one step in the process of human emancipation. It generated or at least sharpened other frustrations or restrictions upon fundamental human aspirations. Spiritual, moral and political emancipation had to be followed by economic and social emancipation. Political freedom and equality, without economic and social means for their concrete realisation, appears to be a fundamental frustration for all people who got them and who are consciously confronted with the possibility or changing the existing economic and social inequalities and injustices. Elimination of economic scarcity, exploitation and poverty, and elimination of social inequalities and power relations on the basis of economic inequality and injustice, appear to be fundamental human aspirations which inevitably arise as soon as they are consciously perceived as real possibilities. Each stage in the historical process of emancipation, once it is attained, generates a movement towards the next stage, on the basis of a sort of "dialectical (psycho-)logic" of human needs satisfactions and aspirations.

If personal safety and political freedom and equality are the primary or dominant aspirations of people, because they felt the unsafety of their lives and their political unfreedom as the main factors of frustration, then the ideal of economic and social welfare and justice may remain slumbering or may not arise at all. But as soon as personal safety and political freedom are arrived at, their satisfaction value appears to be only relative, and people become conscious of the fact that the aspirations beyond their struggle for

personal safety and political freedom have an intrinsic 'logic' that pushes them much farther than what they set out as their ideals. So, economic and social emancipation is felt as the 'logical' next step, or the consequence, or the inevitable complement of the attained emancipation: the step without which the attained emancipation loses the satisfaction value that it was supposed to bear in itself. So we may expect that economic and social emancipation will awaken or sharpen still other aspirations of human emancipation, e.g. the aspiration for fuller intellectual and moral emancipation. Mankind will tend towards fuller liberation from all kinds of irrational fears and taboos, from illusions and prejudices, from religious and political myths, from antihumanitarian ideologies, from needlessly repressive and neurotic moralities.

If this conception of moral tradition, based on the idea that some irreversible moral principles and values result from the historical interplay of fundamental human aspirations and existing living conditions, is reliable, then I would call it "rational" to take them as starting points and as guiding principles for the concrete elaboration of a future oriented morality.

The fundamental principles and values that are the historical product of the emancipatory movements could be taken as the most acceptable base for the valuation of existing moralities and for the orientation of further human development.

This base would justify us in saying that some aspirations, ideals or values are "rational" and that others are not, or — at least — that they are more or less rational.

But, of course, I cannot demonstrate scientifically that this conception of moral tradition is reliable.

It can be argued that the notions "historical trends", "historical evolution", "historical progress" or "emancipatory movements" are not in themselves scientific notions, and that they are inadequate for the description of historical events and processes. Maybe the description of historical events and processes in terms of "emancipation" is a *subjective* and an *ideological* description, one that is determined and coloured by my own ideological and moral preconceptions. If I were only constructing *my* history on the base of *my* subjective appreciation of historical events, and processes, then I would be clearly turning around in a vicious circle, in trying to justify a morality by relying on a view of moral tradition, in which I built in that same morality.

I cannot a priori exclude the possibility that all conceptions of moral tradition might be ideological and subjective constructions. But I don't believe they are. Up to a certain point subjective and

ideological elements will inevitably interfere in each attempt to construct a view of historical and moral evolution. But I don't believe that they necessarily interfere in such a degree that no reliable conception with some degree of objectivity would be possible. And I do believe that certain lines or stages of evolutionary and revolutionary progression and emancipation can be objectively shown in history, in spite of the difficulties we face when we try to define concepts like 'trend', 'evolution', 'emancipation'.

Another argument against my approach could consist in saying that moral tradition and history in general can never be a convincing criterion in moral reasoning. What was and what is as a product of historical processes might be undone, could be changed or annihilated, and in any case cannot possibly justify the value judgment that it *ought* to be, that we *have* it to accept as a legitimate base of ethical thinking. We *can* prefer a system of amoral struggle for life. We *can* refuse to take into consideration all moral consciousness that grew out of historical processes. We can choose an antihumanitarian and anti-emancipatory morality.

Abstractly and theoretically this is true. But I think this argument to be irrelevant on the practical and historical level. Faced with someone who is in favour of an uncontrolled struggle for life or of individual or collective suicide, I have no scientific or logical arguments at hand that could ever convince him of being "irrational". He could indeed endlessly repeat the question: "why should I accept your criteria?" If he assumes a complete solipsistic, egocentric or nihilistic position, I can never force him to leave that position by means of "rational" arguments. But this is so because he excludes himself from any possibility of an ethical perspective. With respect to such a person the concept of a *valid* or *legitimate* or *rational* morality makes no sense at all. The thoroughly amoral person takes a position beyond the realm within which the search for ethical rationality is meaningful or relevant. This realm is confined by the willingness to construct and to accept a system of values and principles with the aim of orienting, organizing and controlling personal and social life in a way that differentiates them from the chaotic state of unlimited struggle for life and uncontrolled egocentrism. Without this willingness the search for a rational morality would be anthropological and sociological nonsense.

Given the fact that we are willing to look for such a system of principles and values, and that we live in a concrete historical situation, and that we are embedded in a moral tradition, we cannot abstract from that situation and that moral tradition, if we are to

find a morality which is relevant and applicable. And if we cannot abstract from it, then I would call it "rational" to take it into account in our normative ethical thinking.

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