

Rationality and Community

By Aristotle's word humans are political animals. This implies at least two things. The first is a biological fact about humans: like some other animals humans live in big communities, the present situation is such that the global human community becomes a reality bearing upon every individual's life. The second thing concerns a way of communication between members of political communities: a community is called political only if its members communicate with a language, have some linguistically constructed identities, linguistically defined beliefs and memories. Ability of humans to cope with each other rather with arguments than by direct physical power is called rationality. Thus to be political animals humans must be rational animals.

The idea that rationality is an essential feature of human beings means that any person in principle is able at least to understand anybody else's arguments (if not share the same beliefs) through some special «rational» way of speech communication coming over linguistic, cultural, religious and any other barriers. In such terms the notion of rationality is applied not to some particular human community but to the ideal global community of all «rational beings». The problem is whether such an ideal community of rational beings can be identified with the global human community as it exists in reality.

There are many anthropological and ethnographic facts which make the notion of universal human rationality sound. Every particular human community uses a language. The principle possibility of reasonable translation from one language into another, at least as far as it concerns basic pragmatic aspect of those languages, is an empirical fact which must not be disregarded and underestimated vis-a-vis much discussed difficulties of understanding between people with different ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. This is also a fact of sociology that ethnic and racial differences between humans don't prevent people to obtain whatever social and cultural background provided a person is grown up and educated in a suitable environment. The existence of international academic community is another argument to say that the universal human rationality is not a pure fiction.

However the classical idea of universal rationality developed by thinkers of Enlightenment was rather based on thought-experiments like Descartes' than on historical and sociological observation and concerned rather theoretical than practical reasoning. Practically it too easy opened a door for discrimination of certain individuals, groups and whole communities by depriving them of the status of rational beings. That is why it was rather easy to defeat the classical concept of rationality presenting numerous cases of alleged incommensurability of different cultural traditions, different values, different ways of reasoning and even different ways to do science and mathematics. While the Enlightenment idea of rationality referred to an individual mind, on the one hand, and to humanity as a whole, on the other hand, later thinkers from German romantics onward stressed what might be called the *local* aspect of rationality, referring rather to particular communities such as nations rather than to individuals.

Today's situation is such that the global human community is no more an utopian construction of an armchair philosopher but is a matter of everyday politics. To make such a politics rational, i.e. based on arguments but not exclusively military force, the

humanity needs a global rationality, i.e. needs to be rational as a whole. It seems obvious however that global social atomization destroying all the local cultural and linguistic identities, local political structures and what might be called local rationalities would rather destroy any rational communication between people than make a step toward global rational community. The global rationality can work rather through than over and above local.

At the coming workshop we are going to speak about rationality as a phenomenon of human community. The following is an open list of topics for the discussion:

- rationality and social action
- local narrative and its rational interpretation
- globalisation and local identities