The Achievement of Moral Rationality

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I

The thesis of this paper is that the final court of rational appeal in questions of morality is never located within the confines of individual consciousnesses and that, consequently, any achievement of moral rationality or knowledge of how to live necessarily includes a public, cooperative enterprise. The multi-person encounter necessary for the attainment of a rational account of what one ought to do I call “dialogue.” Although I believe this view is traceable to Socrates, I will not discuss that question. Rather, I shall argue the thesis that dialogue is indeed essential to moral rationality.

My view is that we can be rational, but you cannot and I cannot. The contrast between this view and contemporary treatments of reason in ethics could hardly be sharper. Contemporary ethicists exhibit objectivist and subjectivist accounts of ethics, but they seem to agree that it is the individual thinker who must possess or generate knowledge and objectivity in ethics, if they are possible at all. Nor is my view to be confused with recent attempts to provide a naturalistic or social theory of the nature of reason; it has little, if anything, to do with the “private language” argument. These latter views hold that the standards or canons of rationality are not innate or inherent within the individual; rather they are social in nature, and the individual comes to be in possession of them in the course of his education/socialization process. Others serve, on this view, to bring the individual to the starting point for rational thought, after which he is competent to think rationally by and for himself. By contrast, my view is that no one, however mature, educated, and “competent,” has within himself the capabilities to act rationally. On the contrary, the individual needs the cooperation of others in every particular moral inquiry that is to progress toward ob-

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jectivity and rationality. If this view is correct, then rationality cannot be private, either in principle or in fact.

Is it absurd to contend that I do not possess the cognitive resources to achieve rationality or objectivity in my decisions, and neither do you, but together we do possess the capability for this achievement? I cannot serve as my own touchstone of rationality and you cannot serve as yours, but I can be a touchstone for you and you for me. These views are likely to strike us as similar to the notion that we could pull ourselves up by tugging on each other’s bootstraps. If I cannot recognize objectivity and rationality in myself or cogency in my views, how can I recognize it in you and your views? It is the contention of this paper that this air of absurdity is nothing more than an indication of our confidence in the Cartesian view that “reason or sense . . . is to be found complete in each individual,” a widespread view despite the criticisms raised since Descartes espoused it.

Socrates’ account of rationality is, strictly speaking, limited to what later philosophers call practical reason; it is a means or tool to help with answering Socrates’ one basic question, “In what way should one live one’s life?” or, as he was apt to paraphrase it (thus begging some important ethical questions), What is the good life? Socrates found himself to be ignorant, to some extent at least, of the answer to this question, and he thought his fellow Athenians were similarly deficient. But how can it be that people are ignorant of the answer to such a question? A person cannot be ignorant from indifference to the answer, since everyone desires the good life. There may be a few people to whom the question has never occurred. And there are some, like Socrates, who realize that they don’t have the answer about how to live and, consequently, spend large amounts of time trying to find the answer. However, it seems to me that the overwhelming majority of people are ignorant because they already believe that they have the correct answer to the problem of the good life.

If confidence in false beliefs about the good life is, then, the main reason for ignorance concerning how man ought to live, it is presssing for every man to reexamine the basic commitments that are definitive of his own conception of the good life. Everyone believes his own beliefs, everyone thinks he values the valuable, and although this observation sounds like a truism, it is precisely for this reason that one’s own acceptance of and faith in his own view carry so little epistemic weight. False beliefs, warped values, misguided commitments simply do not announce themselves to one who holds them; if they did, there would be no such things.

This much is perhaps fairly obvious. But faith in one’s own views is not a peculiarity of the innocent or naïve. One can, then, consider alternative views, construct arguments, offer evidence, etc., and yet obviously one must believe whatever results he arrives at to be the truth of the matter. Moreover, he must believe that the procedure he used in reasoning to them is sound, that the evidence is sufficient to warrant his conclusion. Otherwise he would not yet have concluded. This fact implies added dimensions to the way in which persons are inevitably enamored of their own views. Everyone believes his beliefs, everyone thinks he values the valuable and also everyone finds the evidence that convinces him to be good evidence, the arguments he accepts to be sound. A man may admit in theory a distinction between good arguments and merely persuasive arguments, but if he does, he will inevitably judge all the arguments that persuade him to be good arguments. Consequently, the fact that a person believes that he has good and sufficient reasons for his beliefs, commitments, goals, and values also carries very little epistemic weight. The reflective man is not, therefore, exempt from the general demand that one’s commitments be reexamined, though it may be harder for him to see that this reexamination is necessary.

Two points can be made about the difficulty of carrying out the self-examination. In the first place, it is a man’s most basic commitments and beliefs, the beliefs that are definitive of a man’s conception of himself as a person and his orientation in life, that are to be questioned. Consequently, there are immense difficulties in attaining a neutral, detached point of view from which to conduct the proposed reexamination. In cases of more routine inquiries which examine an opinion or theoretical construct that forms only a peripheral part of the self and can be rejected without any changes in life style, it may be intelligible to demand that one detach oneself from that opinion or construct so that the examination of it can be fair and unbiased. However, the detached, neutral vantage point from which to examine objectively one’s identity, his estimation of his worth as a person, the acceptability of his very form of life, seems to presuppose that the agent detach himself from himself. It is not clear, however, that this sort of detachment is possible or even intelligible. For this reason the very commitments that are to be the subject of reappraisal threaten the reexamination with bias.
Can any man look at himself from the outside, as it were, in this way?

Moreover, the distinction between rationality and objectivity, and right opinion is important here. Rationality and objectivity cannot plausibly be defined in terms of right opinion; the important feature of the blind man on the right road is his lack of vision, not his luck. If one is to be rational, one needs evidence that his view is correct. And this means that the inquiry which is productive of such rationality cannot be identified with inquiry that is in fact methodologically sound or which results in correct belief. Rather one needs evidence that his inquiry is such that it will (or is likely to) produce the correct results. Consequently, a person must form an assessment of the validity of his inquiry so that he can be in a position to know how seriously to take it. The problem, then, is not only to detach oneself from himself, but to recognize success of detachment.

The difficulty can be put in another way. There is an over-simplified view of the relation of personal commitments and a person's reasoning processes which holds that personal commitments, interests, prejudices, etc. exist in one compartment of the self, reasoning processes in another. If this were correct, one could choose to judge rationally what he should do, or he could follow his unreasoned inclinations, but the two alternatives would be unmixed with each other. However, this is not an accurate picture of the human self, for a person's reasoning processes may themselves be decisively influenced by his personal interests. Moreover, a person need not recognize that this influence is in fact operative within him. One kind of rationalization consists in making action in support of one's interest appear (to oneself and perhaps also to others) to be thoroughly disinterested. This kind of rationalization goes on all the time, and any adequate account of a rational, objective inquiry into moral questions must take it into consideration. If a genuine inquiry is an unbiased inquiry, the problem is to ascertain whether one's inquiry is genuine. That it appears so to oneself is necessarily insufficient.

The second complicating feature of the proposed self-examination results from the fact that every man must have some beliefs or other (however implicit) about the way life should be lived, or he would be unable to act deliberately at all. Consequently, the desired self-examination cannot be a process of calling all values and commitments alike into question and then certifying them as all alike either possessing or lacking the appropriate credentials. Paradoxically, the attempt to call all values into question has as a result the evasion of the demand that specific commitments be reevaluated.

In principle objections to the rationality or foundation of values or in principle assertions that they do possess the appropriate credentials are, then, all irrelevant to the self-examination. Instead, the enterprise calls for a procedure which will discriminate between values, which will adjudicate the relative worthiness or worthlessness of values. Some values and commitments possess better credentials than others, and the less well founded values can be rejected because of their incompatibility (either logical or practical) with the more worthy commitments.

This does not mean that there are some values which are beyond question, but it does make the question of a starting point for the whole inquiry a crucial one. One is to question his values, but not to question them all indiscriminately. Which values should he question first and which can be safely take as temporarily given? One kind of irrationality consists in conducting the wrong inquiry, an inquiry in which one presupposes exactly what he should be questioning. And if a person starts by calling into question those commitments which strike him as most shaky or dubious, he will thereby systematically postpone examination of his most inveterate prejudices and his most blinding biases. If the only resources available to a person in selecting this crucial starting point are his personal, subjective estimations of their doubtfulsness, it seems that his inquiry is doomed to superficiality from the start—the person's fundamental presuppositions about values will never get questioned. But the very nature of the ignorance demands precisely reexamination of the fundamentals.

These seem to be the difficulties that stand in the way of the inquiry—that every man's beliefs and the evidence for those beliefs seem satisfactory to him, that the agent must detach himself from himself and also be able to recognize genuine detachment, and that there are serious difficulties in discovering which of one's beliefs are relatively well founded so that one can decide to begin by questioning other beliefs. How then can the individual possess the resources to carry out the enterprise of self-examination? My thesis is that the individual does not possess the capability to carry out this examination of himself. No man can put himself in a position to conduct a rational, objective
inquiry into those beliefs that form the basis of his own life. Left to his own devices, every man would be saddled with an inseparable ignorance about the good life.

These conclusions about the frailties of man's impure practical reason are shared by ethical sceptics, subjectivists, and relativists. But could we acknowledge the difficulties above, and yet emerge with the view that a rational inquiry into the good life is possible?

II

Many philosophical accounts of rationality place the seat of rationality squarely within the confines of the individual consciousness. They hold that the epistemic resources out of which objectivity and rationality are to be constructed are found complete and whole within each (normal) individual person. Moreover (in order to avoid the mistaken reduction of rationality to right opinion), they also claim that everyone has within himself the ability to recognize cases of rationality and objectivity and their opposites, both in his own judgments and in the judgments of others.

The view that individual consciousness is the locus of rationality constitutes an appeal to an intuitive individual sense of rationality. Now unless the final court of rational appeal is individual consciousness, the distinction remains between what is rational or objective and what merely appears so to a given individual, even to a careful, conscientious, reflective individual. And to admit the distinction is to recognize that one person, by himself, does not possess the resources to attain rationality.

Should the distinction be allowed? It would seem that it can be disallowed only by an appeal to some form of introspection which is itself infallible. But then it becomes in principle impossible to provide a check on the accuracy or sensitivity of a man's intuition on these matters. Individual intuition is incorrigible in the sense that it defines rationality and hence cannot be (rationally) corrected.

However, the view that each man possesses an introspectible indicator of rationality and objectivity is simply not plausible on the theoretical or practical level. On the theoretical level, it is impossible to hold that any given man's intuition is definitive of rationality; the standard of rationality must be logically independent of any given person's rational sensibilities and perhaps of the sensibilities of all persons. Consequently, to grant rationality in individual consciousness, we must postulate a pre-established harmony between these independent canons of rationality and the sense of rationality in any given individual. Similarly, we must postulate a pre-established harmony between the intuition of one person and that of all others. Otherwise, rationality could be idiosyncratic, subjective, even inconsistent. The position is plausible, given these postulates, but nothing can make the postulates themselves plausible. For this reason, the account of rationality as grounded in individual consciousness openly invites the subjectivism and scepticism that have historically grown out of it; all that is necessary to precipitate subjectivism or scepticism is to refuse to grant the assumption of such pre-established harmonies.

Moreover, genuine and deep disagreement among "rational men" pushes us to deny these assumptions. Differences among reflective individuals are an embarrassment for the position. Given individual access to the canons of rationality, there should be no occasion for any kind of basic disagreement. Each man should inevitably and infallibly know whether the evidence for a position he is considering is good and sufficient. Ruling out cases of superficial misunderstanding, it follows that men should never disagree except in cases where they antecedently recognize the insufficiency of the evidence for their respective views, which they would therefore maintain only provisionally. Further, it will not do to argue that disagreements are attributable to carelessness, because infallible introspective rationality would reveal his own carelessness to the individual.

Nor are the theoretical difficulties with appeal to an individual sense of rationality exhaustive. When translated into the concrete context of real disagreements among men, this view of the nature of rationality has the disastrous implication that each person, if he is to be rational, must continue to back his own view in cases of disagreement simply because it is his own. If the ultimate court of rational appeal is individual consciousness, then everyone simply must continue to hold that his own view is objectively valid as long as his own consciousness sanctions it. As long as one's own view continues to seem to oneself to be completely sound, it would be irrational to refuse to accept it as such merely because it seemed less than sound to others. Faced with disagreement, a person should perhaps reexamine his own beliefs to see whether they still do meet with his own approval. But if they pass this test, he simply must, to be rational,
back them. Since the ultimate court of rational appeal is internal, this is all he (rationally) can do. To do otherwise would be to acknowledge himself to be essentially and irredeemably irrational, since he is not properly sensitive to the evidence.

The theory of rationality as having no instinct, however, of sanctioning the proclivity of each party in a disagreement to charge the others with irrationality, carelessness, or bad faith; indeed, it requires that each do so. Given genuine and careful inquiry, veracity of his own inner reason, and harmony among different individuals’ reason, the only rational conclusion a person can reach is that others profess to see things differently from the way he sees them because they are irrational, careless, lying, or inquiring in bad faith. Consequently, the practical effect of adopting this theory of rationality would be an increased insistence of each person on his own view. Combined with the failure of someone to see all the evidence and to see it impartially (as must be the case, if evidence is impersonally defined), this implication has the disastrous effect of hardening at least one thinker in subjective dogmatism.

Has too much been made of the alleged internal character of individual rationality? Has the rational individual been pictured as much more isolated, much more confined within himself, than he need be? The theory that the ultimate standards of rationality are found within the mind of each individual does not imply that others can be permitted to contribute nothing to his inquiry. A closer examination of the possible roles of others on this account of rationality will perhaps throw more light on this issue and also serve as a transition to more personal issues.

Any view which sees rationality as the property of individual minds does reduce others to playing accidental roles in inquiry. Consequently it implies an isolation of one man qua knower from all other men. The other can contribute to a man’s rationality and knowledge only by virtue of the accident of having thought of something which he himself could have thought: for and by himself. This theory of the nature of rationality cannot admit that others do for anyone’s inquiry anything that he could not in principle do for himself, since it would thereby acknowledge that he does not have the resources within himself to achieve objectivity and rationality through inquiry. Others may be conceived of only as providing factual information that a person might have gathered for himself or as presenting arguments that he could have articulated himself.

The view that rationality is a property of individuals requires that the person who is being informed by another go through the process necessary to certify the validity of the putative information for himself before he accepts it into his inquiry. He must repeat for himself and thereby check the inquiry yielding the testimony of the other. Testimony cannot be rationally accepted by an inquirer until it has been reworked and rethought and so come to pass the test of his own internal sense of rationality. This means that one should not—rationally should not—accept anything the other says unless and until one comes to know it himself in first-person form.

Others can influence the course of one’s inquiry; indeed, they may influence it decisively. And yet this influence must not be essential for rationality. Others may contribute only accidentally as witnesses or advisors who testify rather than participate in any inquiry. The difference is significant. A witness may influence the outcome or conclusion of an inquiry, but he does not conclude it, for it is not his. The inquirer must accept the testimony of the witness only if it appears to him to be valid and relevant, but the inquirer himself passes judgment on this matter. If the witness dissents, the inquiry simply proceeds without his assent.

To participate in an inquiry is quite different. If and insofar as one participates in an inquiry, the inquiry is partially, at least, his own. The inquiry cannot be concluded until all participants agree on the conclusion. If a person is a participant, his testimony cannot be rejected as invalid or irrelevant unless and until he concurs with this assessment of it. The witness need not be shown that his view is mistaken, unfounded, or beside the point in order that the inquiry ignore it, but the participant must be shown this or the inquiry cannot proceed, since he is a party to it.

In these terms, the theory that rationality is essentially an individual achievement necessarily reduces all others to the role of witnesses in a one-party, first-person inquiry. It insists that each man cling to his own personal assessment of the view of others, since that assessment is the highest court of rational appeal.

III

An account of rationality as essentially an achievement of a multi-person encounter is very different from the view we have
discussed. Perhaps some misunderstanding about where the differences lie could be avoided by starting with some similarities. Both theories of rationality maintain that it is the function of rationality to produce a conclusion that is objective and valid and for which objectivity the rational agent has evidence. Both agree that an objective and valid statement is thereby also intersubjectively valid, perhaps even valid for everyone. Truth, objectivity, rationality are all public in this sense. Finally, both accounts maintain a distinction between validity and acceptance, since there can be irrational acceptance and refusal to accept.

On the view of individual rationality each individual can determine independently and internally whether a judgment possesses validity or objectivity. The opposed account holds that individuals possess no ability to distinguish what they personally find persuasive from what is intersubjectively valid. Therefore, a man's adherence to his own views, even on careful individual investigation, provides very little evidence for the objectivity or rational validity of his view. Thus, the only rational evidence that a person's views are public or universally valid comes through the construction of a public that freely and deliberately accepts the view. The ongoing process of constructing such a public is dialogue. Accordingly, rationality becomes a property of dialogue itself and of its shared conclusions, not of the individual minds of the participants.

After all, if one's conclusion and the supportive evidence are universally valid, they are valid for any given person. Moreover, since all men desire a correct view of the good life, any person will be interested in having this conclusion and evidence, if it has validity. Given this interest, one should be able to show the evidence to another and lead him to reach the same conclusion, if indeed the evidence and the conclusion are universally valid.

If one cannot do so, then one knows that someone (oneself or the other) is not disinterested in his inquiry, is not being sufficiently careful, has made some methodological error, has a one-sided view of things, or is operating in bad faith; but he does not know which party is guilty of such failures. If disagreement persists and this range of possible causes remains open then the only objective or rational conclusion is that one simply does not know whether the evidence he finds completely unexceptionable warrants his conclusion. Or, in the case of two competing accounts with unresolved differences the objective view is that one does not know which is correct, despite his own personal conviction and inquiry. In the face of a disagreement between two persons, the detached, neutral, objective, and rational stance is not for each person to continue to back his own view simply because it is his own. Rather, each should conclude that his views have so far failed to meet the test of inter-subjectivity.

It should be clear that dialogic method allows an inquiry to escape the appeal to individual intuition inherent in any theory of individual rationality. Its insistence that rationality is a public, shared, collective achievement brings this about. Of course, there are starting points to dialogues as there are to any thought. Accordingly, unproven principles are operative in dialogues. A particular dialogue could perhaps, then, be said to rest on those intuitions common to all participants in that dialogue. However, the method of dialogue which consists of a continuing progression of different dialogues can be independent of the intuitions of any particular individual or group of individuals. In the shorter run, mass prejudices and society-wide delusions are still likely to escape detection, though idiosyncrasies and more narrow parochialisms will not.

An obvious question here is: What qualifies the other participant in a dialogue to act as a test of the objectivity of an individual's views? If one's own thinking cannot guarantee its own reasonability, how can anyone else's? If insufficient detachment from commitments biases a man's own views, does it do so as well for others? There simply is no voice of Pure Reason to which either one man or the other can appeal as a guide for inquiry. Even if there were, the problem of recognizing it could remain, as we have seen.

The ability of the other to act as a touchstone against or with which to test one's beliefs and commitments rests not on any perfect hold on the canons of pure reason which the other has and one lacks, but simply on the differences between oneself and the other. The other disagrees with some of one's views and if he is reflective, he has reasons for his position. Given disagreement, the main function of each participant is to present a perspective on the issues and to defend that perspective as if it were his own (which it is). To the extent that it is impossible for anyone to detach himself from the beliefs and commitments that make him what he is, the other in a dialogue performs a service that no one can perform for himself. No person's point of view can completely succeed as an external perspective on itself or as an internal perspective on that of another.

One can examine by himself a position that differs from his own. But examining an opposing position is itself always suspect,
for the initial approach to such a position must logically be
sceptical or negative. No man can be neutral about his own and
an opposing view, for that would presuppose his not having a
point of view at all. Rather, a different view must be approached
as “an objection to be overcome,” “a position to be dealt with.”
In a man’s attempts to reexamine his own views he is and must
always be predisposed to sustain the previous views and to rule
out any objections to them. Yet as a person confronts another
with those views, the other may also be biased, but in such a
way that makes him admirably suited to testing the proposed
views; he is antagonistic, predisposed, if at all, to reject the
account. The other is not detached from and so independent of
all beliefs and commitments, but he does possess an independ-
ence from at least some of one’s own beliefs that one can never
himself knowingly achieve. It is this detachment which makes
the other a suitable touchstone.

The theory that rationality is an individual possession or
achievement assumes, as we have seen, that men are basically
the same qua rational. This similarity among men, which is,
logically prior to discussion, prohibits a viable account of
thoroughgoing and reflective disagreement. The theory that ra-
nality is a collective achievement starts with precisely the
opposite assumption: antecedent to discussion, men are heter-
geneous, fundamentally different in their individual beliefs and
their individual conceptions of rational method in the adjudica-
tion of beliefs. Moreover, individual reflection does not eradicate
these differences—it usually heightens them, as philosophers
should know.

These initial differences are not incompatible with the achieve-
ment of rationality. In fact, they become an essential ingredient
for its attainment. Dialogue always begins with disagreement
and, when successful, it ends with at least some measure of
agreement. Without an area of disagreement between oneself
and others, no dialogue can arise. If two persons had completely
similar views neither could serve as a touchstone for the other;
the attempt to check the beliefs of one against those of the other
would be like buying a second copy of a newspaper to confirm
the report in the first.

Dialogue, then, departs from a dissimilarity between men and
attempts to check their views by constructing, not only a simila-
ity of views, but a unity. There are also similarities and units of
opinion antecedent to mutual inquiry. Agreement of this kind is
not the touchstone of rationality, but its antithesis. The short-
comings of agreement without dialogue are attested by our
rejection of appeals to consensus as rational evidence for the
truth of claims. In morality as elsewhere rationality or objectiv-
ity cannot be reduced to popular consensus. Indeed, if the mem-
bers of a given society are not committed to lives of dialogue or
if they consciously or unconsciously take certain beliefs or values
to be exempt from the need for reexamination, then the rational
view may well be a minority view. Clearly, that a view stands
the test of dialogue does not guarantee its popularity.

Not all methods of producing agreement from an original dis-
agreement are dialogic; neither do they testify to the rationality
of the agreed upon “conclusion.” There are nonrational or ir-
rational methods of persuasion. We can distinguish dialogue,
which aims at truth, from methods of mere persuasion which
aim only at concurrence, without concern for truth. We can also
distinguish agreement through give-and-take of dialogue, from
agreement achieved by means of speeches. The characteristic
feature of a speech is that communication is one-directional—one
person is the giver of opinions, the others are only receivers.
Speeches can therefore have a beginning, middle, and end, while
the speaker knows at the outset. The fact that the end is known
to the speaker at the beginning implies that the speech-maker
does not expect to reexamine his ideas in the course of the
speech. Dialogues, on the other hand, are necessarily open-
ended, not only because all genuine inquiry is open-ended at
the start, but also because real participation by men of different
viewpoints involves contributions to the conclusion which can-
not be anticipated at the start.

Although this theoretical distinction is clear, it does not fol-
low that speeches are always clearly distinguishable from dia-
logues. In fact, many speeches are persuasive precisely because
they pass for dialogue. Consider the college teacher who uses
the “Socratic method” to draw out of his students year after year
the very points he wants them to make. That the same points
are drawn or conclusions reached suggests that the activity
merely looks like dialogue, although even the teacher may be-
lieve it is genuine. Socrates himself may have been guilty on
this point.

Difficulty in distinguishing particular cases of dialogue from
some other methods of reaching agreement stems from the sub-
tlety of the differences in the attitudes of the participants: Are
the participants willing seriously to consider alternatives to their
viewpoints? Are they willing to open themselves to the others
present and to risk being changed by them? Are they willing to accept the others as the kind of people who are capable of having a viewpoint that is worth taking seriously? etc. Despite the difficulty, one needs answers to these questions as they apply to himself and the other participants in conversation to ascertain whether dialogue and hence a suitable testing ground for one's beliefs is being achieved. Because the differences between conversations turn on such matters, it should also be clear that dialogue can disintegrate at any instant; one can discover to his surprise, amazement, and even horror, that a conversation he took to be dialogue was not. He may even come to see that his own views or attitudes kept the conversation from being dialogue.

In addition to these matters of attitude, the distinction between dialogue and other kinds of conversation turns on the intellectual independence of the participants. For the concurrence of another person to count in favor of the validity of a conclusion, his judgment must represent an independent check. The intellectual independence of the participants at the outset is guaranteed by the disagreement from which a dialogue departs. However, it can be easily and subtly lost. For example, if one participant in a conversation is much more knowledgeable about the subject matter, the conversation turns into a pedagogic exchange in which no one can find within himself the resources to challenge the views of the expert. If the other participants in the conversation lose their independent stance, only one original thinker remains in the conversation. The rationality of such a conversation depends on the rationality of the original sacrifice of intellectual independence, but the person who comes to be viewed as an expert must realize that he can no longer expect that his views will be rationally examined in that particular conversation.

There are difficulties, then, in determining whether a given conversation is a genuine dialogue. But if it is a dialogue, reaching agreement implies that at least one of the participants has come to see something he had not seen previously. At least one participant has found that his own commitment does not stand the test of the scrutiny of another. Perhaps both have had to modify their ideas in the course of the dialogue. But if one of the participants emerges from the dialogue with his initial beliefs and the reasons for them intact, he has some small shred of evidence that these beliefs possess more than personal, subjective validity. They have been tested in a way that he alone could not have tested them and they have passed the test. For the first time there is now some evidence that in a very real, concrete sense these views possess interpersonal validity. The result of the dialogue is never conclusive; more dialogue is always necessary. But the evidence nevertheless does slowly accumulate through many dialogues with many people. Consequently, the view that can be sustained throughout a life of dialogue is the rational view, and the life of dialogue is the rational one.

NOTES