Rationality as a Common Public Domain[*]

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ABSTRACT

Even though globalisation is not necessarily a modern phenomenon, quantitatively id does exceed anything which we could observe in the past. In its modern form it entails certain side effects and brings news risks which often involves direct encounters of people representing different or conflicting worldviews and systems of values. To speak of 'a clash of civilisations' or 'a war of civilisations' would be a misunderstanding, probably motivated politically. What is really pertinent is, however, the question to what extent conflicting systems of values (i.e. people representing or subscribing to conflicting systems of values and lifestyles) can coexist or enter in a dialogue, which should be a requirement for any strategy to solve or manage a conflict. In this context, it proves extremely fruitful to distinguish two kinds of rationality: of the first and second level. Such distinction helps, first of all, to understand to what degree, e.g., deeply religious people and secular scientists are rational, and in what context a dialogue or exchange of ideas between such divergent parties is possible. These results can easily be transferred onto a wide range of other conflicting systems of values. Further, the paper claims that it is not cultures or civilisations, the identity which being extremely complex, heterogeneous and multi-layered, as such enter into a conflict but cultural / civilisational subgroups. The conclusion is that a dialogue between two systems of values is in most cases possible, with one exception.

KEYWORDS

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is not a modern phenomenon, strictly speaking. Material goods, discoveries, ideas, thoughts and... genes moved along various pathways, usually along trade routes, best known being the Silk Road, even in the ancient world to a much greater degree than most people think. It is only our ignorance and lack of sufficient data that leads us to think that globalisation is a phenomenon *qualitatively* different from everything else which preceded *our* modern times. The point of fact is, however, that there is a difference, albeit of *quantitative* character. The outcome of the present 'global shrinking' of the planet, facilitated by technological and communicational development, is rapid transfer of ideas and people to various parts of the globe. On the one hand, numbers of migrants (for economic and other reasons) and refugees move to politically or economically safer regions, whereas representatives of the 'affluent West' move in the other direction, prompted by tourism, research or its intentions to be bring humanitarian aid or stimulate development cooperation. It is only the former sort of migration, viz. that of representatives of more or less impoverished, politically oppressed or overpopulated areas, which has all the features of permanent residency in the countries of their destination. The latter venture to foreign places only temporarily: for the duration of holiday, research or professional assignment. However, what moves in the other direction, i.e. towards non-Western regions, and 'settles down' are not necessarily people, viz. tourists and researchers, but certain ideas and values, understood both as a system of news/information and entertainment, and transferred by new means of electronic communication and mass media. In other words, some kind of axiology is, consciously or unconsciously, embedded in Western TV shows, films, computer programs, video games etc. that infiltrate other regions of the world. The exchange and coexistence of different axiologies, not infrequently incompatible with each other, may seem problematic in their likely contributing to misunderstandings, tensions, contestations, conflicts or even open violence and destruction. The paper analyses whether there can be any communication, colloquy, adjustment of positions or compromise between seemingly conflicting worldviews and axiological positions, and if there can be, under what conditions.

THE ENCOUNTER OF VALUES

Naturally, this highly complex exchange of people and ideas which has accelerated in modern times results in direct encounters of often conflicting systems of values. This encounter, interpreted as directly and inherently leading to conflict, has been, both fashionably and misleadingly, named 'the clash of civilisations' by Samuel P. Huntington 1996, who represents a simplified Western perspective, with a shallow reflection and politicised understanding of cultural phenomena other than the Western civilisation[1]. The encounter,

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[1] See for instance the criticism of Huntington's thesis in Bassam Tibi 2001, in chapter: 'Huntingtons These vom «Zusammenprall der Zivilisationen»', pp. 29–42. Through its simplified vision of the world compartmented into antagonistic civilisation some of which – to to inherent and unbridgeable differents – may remain in conflict, the book prepared a ground for the latest phase of the 'civilisational' expansion of USA in the world the most notorious and spectacular expression of which was the 2003 invasion of Iraq: 'if two antagonistic civilisations (Western and Muslim) cannot ultimately compromise, one should arm oneself in order to achieve superiority over the other civilisation'. That is clearly a conclusion very dangerous to the (biological, cultural or civilisational) survival of the human species.

interpreted as a conscious effort to dominate, has also been given a name 'the war of civilisations' (*Krieg der Zivilisationen*) by Bassam Tibi.

We debate here, however, not because the Japanese and the Singaporean travel touristically to Indonesia or Myanmar and the Indonesians or the Burmese seek better economic opportunities or political safety in Japan or Singapore. Likewise, similar exchange of people between India and USA would not lead to much discussion outside strictly scholarly circles interested in cultural anthropology. Such conferences as this one have been held because of basically two kinds of cultural encounters: that between the Islamic world and the West in terms of divergent patterns of social and political organisation with reference to the relation between religion and secularity, and that between conflicting models of the relation between the state and the individual with reference to human rights (in case of China, North Korea etc.). In general, the motivations are somehow politically motivated, and the key point is the threat such cultural encounters posit for the stability of political systems and social orders. In this way, the divides between the Islamic and Western worlds as well as democracies and alternative political orders become relevant.

In passing, it is worth remembering that the tension between such doctrines as Christianity and Islam is due to the monotheistic belief that equips them with the idea of universal mission and with the monopolistic dimension of providing 'the only truth'. That destructive element is basically missing in certain other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Jainism or Hinduism. Interestingly enough, also such a doctrine as democracy in the garb of American-style democracy has the universal bent, which makes its encounter with other universal doctrines especially conflict-conducive.

We now find ourselves in an entirely new situation, that of the 'powder keg of multicultural ingredients', in which groups and concepts directly confront each other. The scale and character of this face-to-face encounter is historically unprecedented and requires novel solutions to handle potential problems. In case of confrontation, no longer can more vulnerable groups or even whole nations shift – or be shifted – into less populated areas, for the latter have already ceased to exist. The humankind could be next to follow with the technological means of destruction and their relative easy availability, unless the encounter of cultures assumes a form of a dialogue, or mutual exchange on any level of contact.

The dialogue between cultures can proceed on various planes pertaining to: sets of values, shared beliefs (e.g. theistic, atheistic, materialist etc.), emotions, common undertakings and practical goals etc., which are ultimately highly superficial and do not facilitate truly mutual understanding, insofar as they are in most cases not compatible or rest on incompatible assumptions. Therefore, the gist of the problem is, as is almost universally accepted, that in order to have a fruitful dialogue both sides require a certain set of shared convictions or values, i.e. a common point of reference, however limited it would be. Otherwise, the dialogue becomes not only futile but also meaningless. In other words, in order to have any fruitful exchange between Christians, Muslims, liberals, democrats or atheists, the precondition would be some kind of paradigm or set of values accepted by the parties involved. The problem which we face was aptly formulated by Plato in *Kriton* 49D in the words of Socrates: 'And if one thinks this way, and the other otherwise, these two will never compromise which means of action to apply; necessarily one will hold the other in contempt, seeing how the other decides.'

It would thus seem that without a common ground, the intentions and acts of the other party that does not share our set of values and beliefs appears not only unintelligible and laughable, but also contemptible. It could also give rise of fear and sense of threat posed by 'the other', and subsequent aggression, e.g. a Muslim immigrant in the West, a Palestinian in Israel, an Israeli in the West Bank, an American tourist in many parts of the world.

The Khwarezmian, Muslim thinker Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) of Khiva was well aware of such a clash of cultural differences, when he expressed the Muslim-Indian encounters in his *Indica* (*Kitab fī Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind* 10)[2]: 'in all manners and usages they [the Indians – P.B.] differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us.' But he also pointed out the universal character of such a fear and contempt of 'the other' when the common system of values and rules of behaviour is missing: '…we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among Hindus, but is common to all nations towards each other.'

It is sometimes claimed that values are not commensurable and cannot be reduced to a common denominator. Following Bernard Williams's analysis[3], one could distinguish at least four formulations of the 'incommensurability thesis':

> (1) there are no current values that could help solve every conflict of values,

> (2) it is not true that in case of any conflict we can refer to some other, higher value, independent of all other values that are in conflict, in order to solve the conflict,

> (3) it is not true that in case of every conflict of values, there always is a value to which we can refer in order to solve the conflict,

> (4) no conflict of values can be solved rationally.

It can easily be demonstrated that each subsequent formulation is stronger and entails the acceptance of the former thesis. Therefore, I shall deal with the fourth one, because when it is solved, or better understood, the preceding theses will also be explained away.

To assume that no conflict of values can be solved rationally means that either (1) there is no meta-value as an ultimate point of reference which surpasses the values in conflict, or (2) that the values in conflict cannot be derived from it, or (3) that there is no common ground with recourse to which we could analyse the conflicting values. All these three interpretations presuppose that a common domain can never be found for any conflicting values.

This problem was once called the problem of 'the framework' by Karl R. Popper[4]. He formulated it as follows: rational and fruitful discussion is impossible, unless the participants do not share common core of basic assumptions or do not agree, at least for the sake of discussion, on such a core[5]. In other words, any discourse is possible within the framework, or intellectual model, of shared assumptions. Since, in his eyes, the widespread idea of 'the framework' rests on false assumptions, he called it 'the myth of the framework'. Popper subsequently attempted to refute the myth in twofold manner. Firstly, any discussion among people who share most beliefs cannot be *fruitful*, although it may be *pleasant*, whereas a discussion among parties sharing disparate convictions is necessarily fruitful, although not as much pleasant. It also happens to be generally very difficult, as well. Alternatively, if the gap between two intellectual frameworks is too wide, we can usually bridge it not through the search for common framework but via the search for common problems to solve[6].

Indeed, in case of *intellectual* confrontation with assumptions utterly different from ours we are forced to re-evaluate our own assumptions, which is highly beneficial from a philosophical or scientific perspective. We thereby profit first of all *cognitively*. But in order to profit from this potentially fruitful dialogue, two preliminary conditions have to be

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[2] See the translation by Edward C. Sachau 1910: 20.
[3] Bernard Williams 1979: 71–83.
[4] Karl R. Popper 1976: 23–48, and Karl R. Popper 1994.
[5] Cf. Karl R. Popper 1976, Chapter 2.3.
[6] Cf. Karl R. Popper 1976, Chapter 2.4.

fulfilled: firstly, both parties have to *agree* to participate in it, and, secondly, what is at stake is truth, and not survival. Popper's first solution is feasible only when the disputants can leave the discussion hall without much repercussions or risk. In other words, the condition for the solution is freedom of choice. In the situation when stability and peace in such a multi-cultural context is highly volatile, and the inter-cultural dialogue becomes counterfeit, Popper's solution seems no longer feasible.

The second approach, viz. the search for common problems, if we cannot agree on common values, could prove more effective to bring the parties to the 'round table' for dialogue. As Popper puts it, 'various human groups have much in common, for instance common problems related to their own survival'. Again, the precondition is that the parties agree to have at least a common problem. In confrontation with the idea of, say, armed *jihad* – in the spirit of extremist understanding – taken as the means to establish the Islamic law and order in the world at any cost, even at the cost of the perpetrators' own biological survival, *their* problem is different from the problem faced by representatives of, say, a 'hedonistic' Westerner. The most existential human problem, it seems, is indeed the question of one's own survival. But one's own survival has many facets and is not restricted to biological survival only. The so-called altruistic acts at the cost of one's own life are frequently motivated by the egoistic desire to keep one's own life intact. But the intactness here does not imply bodily or physical survival, but rather emotional or intellectual well-being, that rests on the reasoning that could be reduced to the law of simple transposition ($p{\rightarrow}q \equiv q'{\rightarrow}p'$): 'my life is intact if and only if the condition p is fulfilled'. In other words, the condition p could also be for instance acting in accordance with one's own set of moral or religious assumptions, in which case the departure from the moral rules would undermine the intactness of one's spiritual life and survival in the ethical or religious sense. Very similar motivation lies behind cases of suicidal attempts that aim at preserving, e.g., one's own emotional, religious or intellectual life etc. Accordingly, in confrontation, an advocate of armed *jihad* and, say, a hedonist will define the idea of survival quite differently and they will formulate entirely discrepant set of conditions for the preservation of their lives. Thus the framework in both these cases in entirely different.

Popper, as we can see, tacitly assumes a philosopher's or a scientist's perspective, i.e. a position true to the spirit of human nature, which is cognitive or rational. Ultimately, he does implicitly – despite his initial intentions – posit some kind of framework within which we ultimately operate.

THE RATIONALE PARADIGM

Ultimately what Popper called 'the myth of the framework' is neither a myth nor an idea that is necessarily harmful. We should rather call it 'the requirement of the framework' for any discussion. This could at least be an intention to participate in the discourse, or mutual agreement that we seek truth, or the participants' wish to survive. Eventually, the basic prerequisite is to share at least one feature that enables the participants exchange of ideas: rationality. That is what I shall call the *rationale paradigm*, which constitutes the conceptual framework for any dialogue: the parties need some rationale to engage in any exchange (be it exchange of ideas of practical cooperation, etc.), and the rationale has to be of such a nature that it can be argued for (or against) by taking recourse to some rustication and reasoning. This would play the role of the framework for discussion.

But do we, in the multicultural and conflict-prone context, have any common framework? Is there any likelihood for such divergent attitudes as that of a scientist, neopositivist or analytic

philosopher, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of an Islamic fundamentalist or an oil-lobbied politician to meet on some shared ground? As a matter of fact, the genuine commensurability of cultures, the problem which is intrinsically related to the understanding of 'the other', can only be achieved by delineating the common framework, or mutually accepted point of reference.

Generally, there is no way to disagree with Bassam Tibi's conclusion that the clash of civilisations, in whatever sense we take it, 'can be overcome only through secular reason – in the way the reason of the ancient Greeks once brought the Muslims and Europeans close to each other without *jihad* and *crusade*. Muslims respected Aristotle, and Christians learnt from Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroës how to think rationally. The reason links, whereas religion, especially politicised religion, divides.'[7]

There would seem, however, to be hardly any point shared by secular and religious world views, especially those expressed in different cultural contexts. However, the *rationale paradigm*, the way I wish to propose it here, does not have to oppose religious or ideological world views.

Suppose the clash of, on the one hand, the entirely secular world view, based on scientific methodology, experiment and observation which describes the universe in terms of quantum physics and astronomy, and, on the other, its anti-scientific Islamic counterpart, called by John Waterbury *flat-earthism*[8]. Indeed, in the eyes of a strictly religious Muslim, any modern scientific picture of the world structure could be viewed as anti-religious, insofar as it would not be corroborated by the scripture. *Flat-earthism* is not the sole peculiarity of Islamic extremist, but it is equally shared by modern-day Christian extremists, who likewise reject the theory of evolution or the scientific descriptions of the beginnings of the universe. This anomaly secures some ground, for instance, in a few regions of the USA where anti-scientists demand the ban on teaching anything that does not comply with the *Book of Genesis*.

TWO LEVELS OF RATIONALITY

However, even in such extreme cases what is rational is that the propounders of such radically irrational views *rationally* and, in their eyes, consistently derive conclusions from a certain set of assumptions. We could say that the assumptions play the role of axioms, which are generally accepted more or less rationally, either with faith, or for heuristic or aesthetic reasons, or because of their simplicity etc. But what is always rational is *the method of derivation* of our conclusions.

As the famous logician Alonzo Church[9], in delineating the foundations of mathematical logic, postulated: 'the specification of the axioms shall be effective in the sense that there is a method by which, whenever a well-formed formula is given, it can always be determined effectively whether or not it is one of the axioms,' and, further, 'the axioms must be specified … by means of a statement of finite length in the meta-language', unless their number is not finite; that being the case, axioms must be specified in some less direct way, but also by means of a statement of finite length in the meta-language. In other words, we, as a rule, formulate axioms in meta-language, viz. in terminology and through ideas that transgress

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[7] Bassam Tibi 2001, in chapter: 'Huntingtons These vom «Zusammenprall der Zivilisationen»', pp. 186–187.
[8] John Waterbury 1988: 239–302.
[9] Alonzo Church 1956: 51–52, § 07.

the confines of the system. For instance, the axioms we eventually adopt to construct a system of logic must be effective, but the idea of 'effectiveness' does not belong to the terms of language of the system, but to the meta-language that serves to describe the system.

We can compare this situation to constructing, e.g., system of values or religion-based picture of the world. One may accept a certain system of values or a religious outlook and invariably refer to scriptural statements, which are irrationally believed to be endowed with divine authority. But even a truly religious person will repeatedly verify his or her beliefs, statements and acts with the testimony of the scriptures: to a religious mind, the tenets of the *Bible* or the *Koran* play a role of such axiomatic statements. Even though the results may not be very rational and consistent when measured against an external system of logic, internally – within the framework of the person – they should be consistent with the accepted religious dogmas. The framework does not have to appear altogether rational, but it will contain a *rational* method of derivation of secondary thoughts and beliefs from primary dogmas, and also a *rational* method of verification, which involves rational tests whether the secondary, derived thoughts and beliefs are in agreement with the primary, 'axiomatic' set of values, or not. An element of this rational attitude is the corrigibility of derived conclusions (secondary thoughts and beliefs). Even in a radically religious world view, one is obliged to verify whether one's goals are consistent with what the *Bible* or the *Koran* decrees.

We can, therefore, speak of two levels of rationality. First-level rationality is the reflected, basic co-ordination of ones own acts and derived, secondary thoughts and beliefs with, either consciously or unconsciously, adopted 'axiomatic' dogmas, or primary set of values. This is what one generally does in everyday life. The primary set of values can be adopted in various ways, through rational reflection, by force of tradition, upbringing, religious obligation, fear of sin, uncritical faith etc., and may even be treated as something not liable to any further criticism or doubt. What is corrigible and adjustable in the first-level rationality are secondary, i.e. derived thoughts and beliefs, corrected in accordance with the primary set of values, i.e. axioms, dogmas or presuppositions which may remain intact and can even never questioned. However, the primary set of values are by no means liable to corrections at this level.
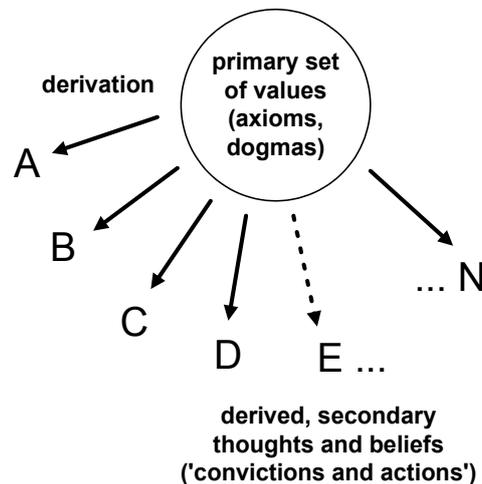

Fig. 1. First-level rationality. The arrows indicate derivation of secondary thoughts and beliefs (A, B, C, D, E, … N), which are actual judgements and opinions and have direct impact on one's actions and dealings with the world, from the primary set of values.

The rationality behind the *choice* of primary set of values lies, however, solely within the domain of second-level rationality. This is the meta-level required for the first-level rationality. Thus, second-level rationality, whereas it presupposes all the conditions of first-level rationality, additionally involves a conscious and rational decision behind adopting the 'axiomatic', primary set of values, which by necessity remains open to criticism or critical enquiry. Whereas first-level rationality does not have a room for potential radical change within the primary set of values (axioms, dogmas) and cannot envisage even a theoretical possibility of abolishing the heretofore accepted tenets, at the second-level rationality one has to necessarily conceive of a theoretical possibility when the primary set of values may be proved inadequate or simply wrong or false. In other words, it has to take into account two scenarios: that the 'axiomatic' values are either (1) correct or (2) wrong, for truth (correctness) cannot exist without falsehood (wrong), and the possibility of falsehood of our axioms is indispensable for truth.[10] Accordingly, in the second-level rationality both the derived, secondary thoughts and convictions and the primary set of values are corrigible.
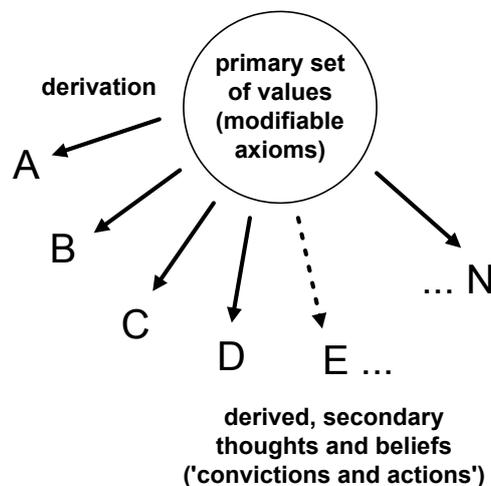

Fig. 2. Second-level rationality. Primary set of values is modifiable and can be adjusted in order to eliminate observed inconsistencies between derived secondary thoughts and beliefs and in accordance with observable fact, so that the set corresponds to the reality the way it is perceived.

To put it differently, at the first-level rationality one defines and corrects one's convictions and actions in accordance with a primary set of values, which are taken for granted (for a reason of without a reason). One tries to be consistent in one's convictions and actions at the first level and, in case of contradiction or inconsistency with each other or with the primary set of values, adjust them accordingly. The justification for such convictions and actions is their agreement with and derivability from the primary set of beliefs and values. If a conviction of action is felt to be incompatible with it, it is postulated that they be modified, corrected, rectified. This is what most people do, at least from time to time. However, the primary set of values remains intact, and is taken – at least from the point of view of the first-level rationality – as unmodifiable, unchangeable, given. Since it, being usually uncritically adopted, may be internally inconsistent, there will never be a situation when all or most convictions and actions are consistent with each other and form a congruous network. What is certainly rational at this level is the attempt to derive convictions and actions from a primary set of values through certain justified and adopted procedures, and to make derived

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[10] See Bertrand Russell 1912.

convictions and actions compatible with each other. At this level one is rational as long as one is ready to question, on the one hand, the validity and truth of derived, secondary convictions, beliefs and actions and the legitimacy and correctness of derivation, on the other. One does not question, however, the validity of the primary set of values. One may be first-level rational, without necessarily being second-level rational.

The requirements of the second-level rationality stipulate that if any inconsistencies between derived convictions and actions are found at the level of derived, secondary convictions, beliefs and action (or even if any inconsistency is found at the level of the primary set of values) and they cannot be further modified in order to be consonant with each, one searches for the source of inconsistency at the primary set of vales. This, however, requires that the primary set of values is no longer intact, unmodifiable and fixed. One is ready to question all: both validity of the secondary, derived convictions, thoughts and actions and the consistency and soundness of the primary set of beliefs. Rationality is therefore understood as entailing the ability to question, analyse, adjust and modify one's beliefs and systems of values in order to achieve a certain level of consistency and soundness.

The division of rationality into two levels helps us understand a seeming conflict between (genuinely) 'religious' and (genuinely) 'scientific' explanatory approaches. One may wonder in what sense a religious person who relies e.g. on scriptures and faith is rational? Is he or she at all rational, at least in the sphere of religion? (We, human beings, are never rational in all aspects, of course). If he entertains certain beliefs solely relying on e.g. the *Koran* or the *Bible* and on his or her faith, that seems hardly compatible with rational attitude. Would that mean that a religious person cannot be rational at least when it comes to his or her religious beliefs, viz. is deprived of the ability to question, modify and adjust his or her beliefs in the sphere of religion? And to what degree is a scientist rational when he, for practical reasons, has to adopt a whole range of beliefs without having actually tested their legitimacy himself or herself?

By adopting the distinction of two levels rationality the reply to these questions and paradoxes seems rather straightforward. A religious person, despite entertaining a whole range of beliefs, is rational as long as he or she derives his or her secondary convictions, beliefs and actions from the set of dogmas (primary set of beliefs) in a consistent manner and as long as makes an attempt to keep these convictions more or less compatible with each other. For instance, if he beliefs (for whatever reason) that (1) a genuine virgin can give birth to a baby, and also beliefs that (2) if a genuine virgin gives birth to a baby, the baby is of divine origin, then if he finds a case (narrated e.g. in a scripture) that a virgin has given birth to a baby, he knows that (3) the baby is of divine origin. Even though the contents of premises (1) and (2) is a matter of pure uncorroborated belief, the conclusion (3) is derived in a rational way. What is rational here is the rule of derivation. To give another example, suppose one beliefs that (*1) there exists god and this god who created the world is omnipotent, omniscient and good. From the dogma (*1) he draws the conclusions that (*2) the world created by such god must be good and that (*3) nothing in this world has a different origin than creator god. Derived convictions (*2) and (*3) may at first seem completely innocuous, however when confronted with (*4) the existence of the observable and palpable evil, lead to a paradox: how can god, who is omnipotent (can create any world), who is omniscient (knows all aspects and all future of its creation) and who is good (cannot create any evil), create the actual world full of suffering and evil? Either (*2) or (*3) has to be rejected, or one would have to deny (*4), i.e. that suffering and evil exist. A believer will seek to make all the three, i.e. (*2), (*3) and (*4), compatible with each other by searching for some additional justification or reject the claim that evil exists as something which has source in god. In any case, these attempts to make (*2), (*3) and (*4) compatible with each other and with (*1) may be rational, even though the acceptance of (*1) – based on religious faith – is certainly not. Faith by definition is not rational. One is rational in questioning the validity of (*2), (*3) and (*4), but a religious person will never seriously and sincerely question the validity of (*1), i.e. a part of the primary set of beliefs (dogmas). By 'seriously and sincerely questioning' I understand a situation when one is, from the outset,

genuinely discard the belief put in question and ready to adopt a new paradigm. For a religious person such a new paradigm without god is never a serious alternative, unless one ceases to be religious. In the same manner, also a Talib or fanatical suicide bomber may be rational in so far as he or she may *rationally* derive certain conclusions from the body of dogmas (primary set of beliefs), which are in themselves taken to be beyond any doubt and lie outside of the realm of genuine questioning.

A scientist (who at many other occasions in his or her life may entertain a range of various beliefs adopted irrationally and relying on pure faith) is (or rather should be!) rational in his respective field at two levels. He examines the validity of a range of answers and explanations which can be deduces from axioms of background scientific theory (paradigm). He accepts their validity as long as they positively undergo a test of verification and falsification. When some incompatibility between some of such answers is discovered, he may discard one (or more) of them after some further enquiry. If this further enquiry reveals that the incompatibility has its source in the adopted scientific paradigm or in a set of axioms, the scientist begins (or, at least, should begin) to genuinely question the validity of this primary set of beliefs, i.e. the paradigm, background theory or axioms, and subsequently, when necessary, should be ready to abandon the paradigm or axioms completely or recast them so that they no longer yield a contradiction or paradox which has been previously observed at the level of secondary, derived statements and beliefs. Unlike the religious person, he may safely remodel the primary set of beliefs or discard it and adopt a new one, better suited, without running the risk of ceasing to be scientific in this enterprise.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Irrespective of cultural background, every one needs a rationale to act. A current maxim in ancient India, very popular among classical Indian philosophers, states: 'Even a stupid person does not undertake an action without a motive' (*prayojanam anuddiśya na mando 'pi pravartate*). The rule is, I believe, universally binding in any part of the world. One may irrationally and unquestioningly accept the religious or ideological authority of the *Koran* or of the *Bible*, or of the *Mein Kampf*, but the rational element will be involved in the subsequent course of actions undertaken by the individual: he or she will attempt to give his or her actions a consistent form in agreement with the adopted tenets. The degree of consistency may of course differ and it will depend on the intellectual capabilities, education and logical training of the individual, etc. But in this particular case there seems to be no insurmountable gap between the faith and reason. Even when one declares, what ostensibly goes against the idea of rationality, that 'rationality by itself without the light of revelation from God can neither be a sure guide in the affairs of mankind nor provide spiritual nourishment to the human soul,'[11] one does provide a *rationale*, and thereby follows a rational method, even though not in letter and contents. But that is the case of first-level rationality which pertains to e.g. the rules of derivability.

The idea that, despite enormous cultural differences, people do share some common cognitive framework is expressed by al-Bīrūnī. He personally seems to share the opinions of the Hindus and Socrates and Plato, to whom he explicitly refers in his *Indica* (*Kitab fī Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind* 35)[12]: 'In the book *Gītā* we read: "Man is created for the purpose of *knowing*; and

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[11] *Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights*.
[12] See the translation by Edward C. Sachau 1910: 70–71, Chapter VII.

because *knowing* is always the same, man has been gifted with the same organs."[13] … This resembles the opinion of Socrates: "…we should come near *knowledge* [italics mine] by getting rest from the ignorance of the body, and we should become pure by knowing ourselves as far as God would permit us. And it is only right to acknowledge that this is the truth"[14].'

Rationality can, of course, be cultivated internally in one's reasoning, or can find its outward expression in one's actions consistent with adopted set of tenets, or values. However, as long as it remains internal and unexpressed, it is subjective, also in the sense that the verification of its consistency with values adopted by the individual in question remains restricted to the individual, which ultimately make his or her personal 'rationality' unverifiable, at least in the sense the one is not confronted with unexpected questions (as long as one is confined to one's own internal enquiry, nothing unexpected, i.e. from the outside or a questioning from another agent, can compel one to go off the beaten track of internal line of thoughts). . On the other hand, rationality becomes interpersonal – and it becomes what it really is – only when it is expressed with the means of language and ideas, that is: only in dialogue or debate, either when it comes to an exchange of ideas or when the discursive necessity compels one to express one's ideas, which, in its turn, entails a potential need to justify them in front of other debaters. In other words, rationality has to fulfil the demand of interpersonal validation and is a 'common enterprise'.

The above remarks are not very novel, insofar as ancient Indian philosophers were well aware of it. Bimal Krishna Matilal, an acclaimed specialist in Indian epistemological tradition, called once debate the 'preferred form of rationality'[15] in classical India. This was likewise the case in ancient Greece, and has been in Europe throughout the ages, but also in the world of mediaeval Islam, which adopted the Greek philosophical heritage. Jonardon Ganeri rightly observed that 'the model of rationality which comes out of the theory of debate is that of persuasion in accordance with public norms of correctness' (p. 149)[16], which is precisely what I have called the demand of interpersonal validation, or 'common enterprise'.

Rationality, therefore, has to necessarily be a public thing, or belong to *public domain*, in order to preserve its character. An attempt to create some kind of individual rationality is straightforwardly self-abortive. Otherwise any loose train of incoherent associations of a madman – not shared by anyone else, but seemingly 'substantiated' within his uniquely personal, semi-solipsistic world – could be deemed rational. I have deliberately chosen the term 'public domain' in its both senses of the word: (1) in accordance with the colloquial understanding as an *open ground*, not exclusively possessed by any private person and accessible to everyone, and (2) in the legal sense that describes the status of a published work or invention which *may be used by the public* without any specific restriction, insofar as the copyright or patent on which has expired or which has never been subjected to such copyright.

What it practically means to us is that no culture or representative of any ethnic group or civilisation is privileged in its access to rational tools and logical reasoning. This is the other facet of the *rationale paradigm*.

Let me here refer to a parable offered by al- Bīrūnī in his *Indica* (*Kitab fī Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind* 41)[17], which is supposed to represent various attitudes to knowledge and human cognitive capabilities: A man was travelling together with his four students at night. In the darkness, they saw something standing erect in front of them in the middle of the road. The teacher asked his students what that could be. The first student replied: 'I don't know what it is.' This is an instance of utter ignorance and contentment with one's own ignorance. The second

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[13] Interestingly, no passage of the extant *Bhagavad-gītā* contains the idea explicitly.
[14] This is a clear reference to Plato's *Phaedo* 65B–D, 67A.
[15] Bimal Krishna Matilal 1998: 32.
[16] Jonardon Ganeri 2000: 147–156.
[17] See the translation by Edward C. Sachau 1910: 84–85.

student said: 'I don't know what it is, and I have no means of learning what it is.' This represents a case of professed cognitive incapability and scepticism. The third student concluded: 'It is useless to examine what it is for the rising of the day will reveal it.' His reply represented, in its turn, the lack of any desire to know, viz. cognitively passive attitude. The fourth student, however, approached the mysterious object, examined it carefully step by step, and discovered that these were pumpkins. In the end, he revealed his findings to his teacher. To al-Bīrūnī, the fourth student is the paragon of proper cognitive approach: empirical examination and rational analysis. To corroborate the appropriateness of the rational approach, al- Bīrūnī further quotes Greek philosophers: Ammonius, Socrates and Proclus, to prove that the fourth student's course of actions is a universally valid procedure.

The parable is quite significant because it is meant to show that any human being, in the world known to al-Bīrūnī, has the inner capacity to be rational. This contention holds valid in Khwarezm and Central Asia, in Afghanistan and India, among Arabs and the Greek. There is basically nothing that would by nature prevent anyone from acting rationally. The problem is that some people apply rational tools in their life to a much lesser degree then one could hope for, which might seem to turn the above conclusion into overoptimistic wishful thinking. As al- Bīrūnī's bitterly contends in his *Indica* (*Kitab fī Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind* 13)[18]: 'The belief of educated people and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses, and are content with derived rules, without caring for details…'

MULTI-LAYERED IDENTITY

Accordingly, the real divide in the world is not along the boundaries of different cultures but it cuts through the very cultures themselves. In their basic motivations and attitudes, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Americans, French, Indians, Arabs, Poles, Israelis, atheists, agnostics, fundamentalists, scientists etc. alike have the capacity to be rational and to act rationally in the above defined sense. The difficulty is that some don't avail themselves of the capacity, at least not on occasions when that would be most called for.

We do not as a matter of fact face the encroaching clash of civilisations, as Huntington or others want it, or the real war of civilisations, as Bassam Tibi puts it, but rather a conflict which is both *intracultural* and *extracultural*. What I mean by intracultural is that within one and the same culture various conflicting tendencies are always represented. Furthermore, they may extend over its boundaries to other cultures – in this sense they are extracultural.

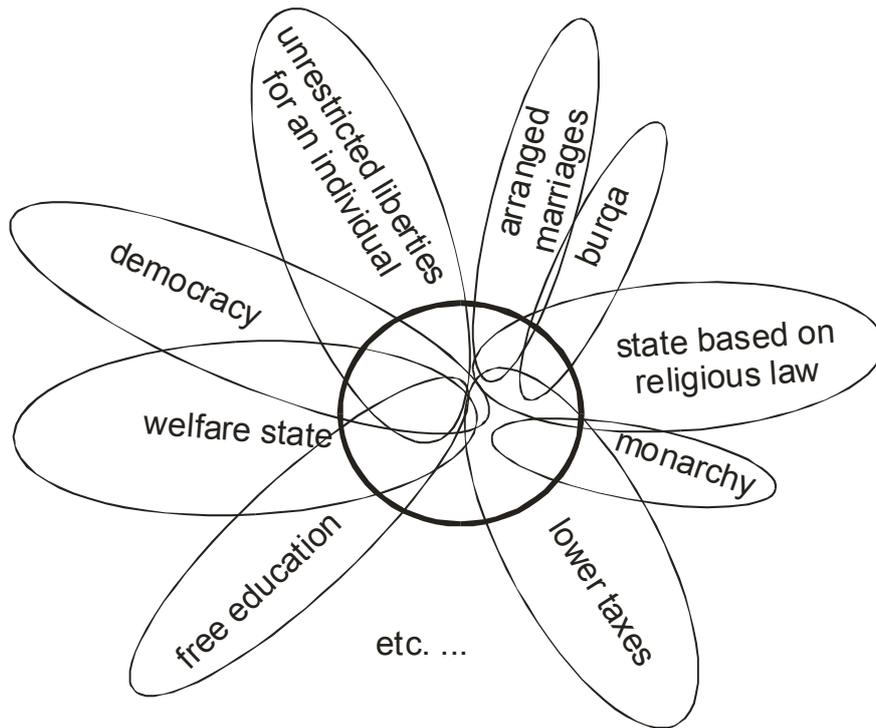
[18] See the translation by Edward C. Sachau 1910: 27.

Fig. 3. A society (culture, civilisation) never forms a unified, homogeneous body of values recognised by its all members. Therefore, it never functions as a uniform block vis-à-vis another society (culture, civilisation). Members of its subgroup with reference to one value (say, 'welfare state') are united in this particular aspect, but may vary with respect to a range of other values.

Irrespective of culture, we always find to coexist 'the educated' and 'the uneducated', those who apply rational thinking in their acts and rational assessment of the consequences of their actions, and they practise this on various levels of abstraction, and those who don't. If we find real conflicts of values of practical importance it is not necessarily along the divide e.g. Christianity–Islam, or Muslim way of life *versus* Western style of living. A conflict of values may arise within the same civilisation, splitting it into disparate groups of axiological interests. To give an example, within the realm of Western civilisation we can easily find irreconcilable trends that differently define fundamental values: in 1864 the pope Pius IX, in his encyclical *Quanta cura*, condemned such values as rationalism, religious freedom guaranteed by law, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press and legal order which would allow any criticism directed against the Catholic church. These were precisely the values taken for granted in various milieus in Europe and the USA.
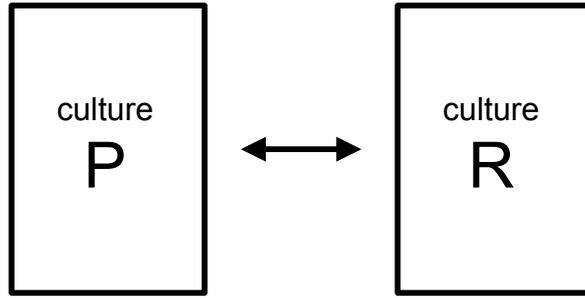
Fig. 4. We never find the situation that one culture (civilisation) opposes another one *en bloc*, with respect to all values. Black arrow indicates conflict.
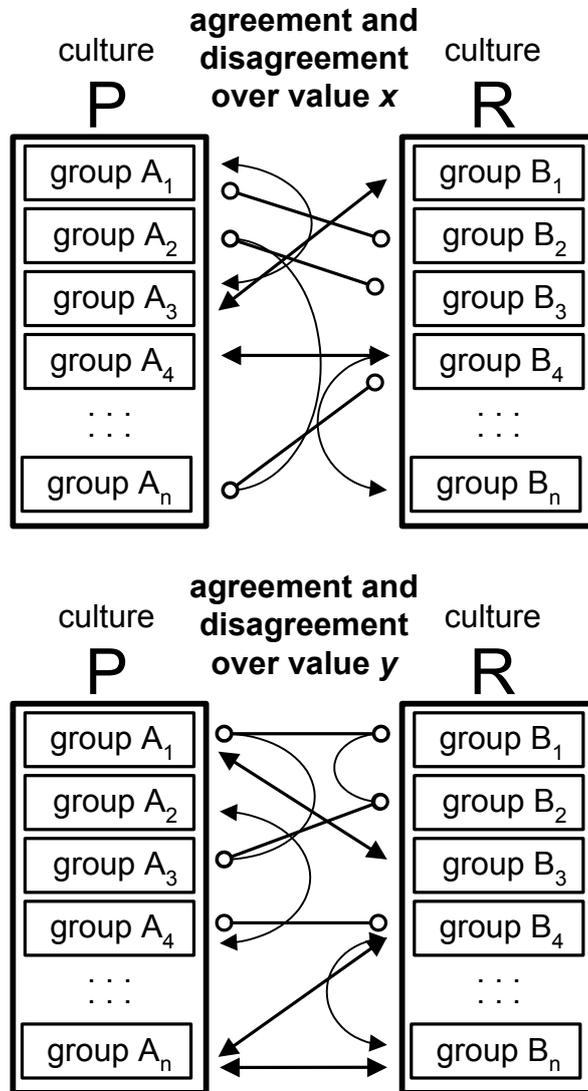

Fig. 5. Instead, we find two (or more) cultures (civilisation), each consisting of a large number of various groups that can be distinguished by professing a particular value *x*, *y*, etc. The members of the same group may be united as regards that particular value, but

may be in opposition as regards other values. Two cultures are always in opposition and in agreement at the *very* same time, because some of the members of culture A agree with some members of culture B on certain values, and some members of culture A disagree with some members of culture B on some other points: they will agree/disagree on certain points with the members of their own culture. Black arrows indicate conflict with respect to a particular value, round-ended lines indicate agreement.

Further, a certain value-defined group A_1 of a certain culture P may enter into co-operation with a group B_1 of another culture R to protect a value x shared by both group A_1 and group B_1, which goes against other groups within their respective civilisations (e.g. A_2, A_3, A_4, ... A_n of civilisation p and B_2, B_3, B_4, ... B_n of civilisation R). Or, alternatively, the same groups A_1 and B_1 of cultures P and R, respectively, may closely co-operate in order to abolish value y shared by other groups of their respective cultures. A good example of such 'cross-civilisational' teamwork could be the UN Cairo Demographic Conference held in 1994, at which Vatican diplomats ('group A_1 of civilisation P') and Islamist delegates ('group B_1 of civilisation R') attempted to torpedo the final declaration accepted by EU and the USA ('groups A_2 and A_3 of civilisation P'). The same scenario was followed at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Clearly, we can also speak of other sets of values, that are to a large extent an outcome of the technical, purpose-oriented Western thought, and that find their expression in consumerism, which is not restricted to the West, but is represented universally in all civilisations, including representatives of Japan, United Arab Emirates or Kuwait. We can see that what we have here is rather a conflict of various world views, which can also derive from the same geographical region, or even culture and are instantiated in a number of cultures.

In view of all the above, it is justified to renounce the Huntington's misnomer of 'clash of civilisations', for the simple reason that only certain groups within each of the civilisations can be potentially in conflict. Likewise the idea of 'the war of civilisations' can be misleading. Instead we should rather return to the old term coined by Raymond Aron[19]: 'heterogeneity of civilisations'. This leaves enough room for civilisations to differ from each other and to be internally differentiated, and does not predetermine whether civilisation-nested groups of various values are conflict-prone or not.

CONCLUSION

If we combine the results of my remarks on rationality and rational approach and on values embedded in various civilisations, there seem to be four conceivable theoretical possibilities when two parties (cultures, civilisation) meet, depicted in the following table:

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[19] Raymond Aron 1962.

	first-level rationality present	first-level rationality absent
coinciding sets of values	— no conflict — fruitful dialogue	— no conflict — fruitless dialogue
antagonistic sets of values	— conflict (soluble) — fruitful dialogue	— conflict (insoluble) — fruitless dialogue

While reading the table, we should bear in mind that 'fruitful dialogue' refers to 'added-value dialogue', or such a discourse that brings in a new component to our knowledge, that enriches it. Only two situations can make the dialogue fruitful, by enriching our knowledge and by contributing to our understanding. There is only one situation when the conflict of two sets of values can potentially be solved, or at least weakened, insofar as there is some kind of common framework, whereas one specific situation leaves no room for any genuine solution and is potentially inflammatory, insofar as neither the values nor methical points of reference do not even partially overlap: this is a situation in which any exchange of ideas is hardly possible and one must resort to other means to solve the conflict.

What is important, the presence or absence of the second-level rationality, when values are confronted, is irrelevant in the context of solving potential conflict.

Returning to Bernard Williams's fourth claim that no conflict of values can be solved rationally, we can see that only such conflict of values that is accompanied by fruitless dialogue has no prospects of being solved, whereas the conflict of values which opens the possibility of enrichment of our knowledge and contributes to our understanding can indeed be solved. The former conflict takes place outside of any framework, i.e. without any common, acceptable point of reference and without first-level rational method. The latter is endowed with the framework by virtue of taking recourse to the first-level rationality. Its result is both mutual understanding of the other, opposing set of values, which is in conflict with my own set of values, and mutual verification of the accuracy of conclusions derived from primary set of values. In other words, the dialogue becomes fruitful. And this 'fruitfulness' becomes a new kind of meta-value, which can, under favourable conditions, be used as a common point of reference by the conflicting parties (here comes also the place for the second-level rationality). At the same time, in the latter kind of dialogue the participants are obliged, by working in the same framework, to learn the principles of the conflicting set of values in order to be able to verify the accuracy of derivational procedures of the other disputant.

To recapitulate, in inter-cultural dialogue, for it to be effective, the parties should not straightforwardly discuss the fundaments of their respective systems of values and world views, but rather first refer to the rational rules through which the disputants reason and derive their statements from 'axioms' (dogmas) accepted by them. Only after they have discovered some common rational framework and rules of reasoning and after they have understood the other disputant's set of values, they can embark on a discussion of the values themselves. The eventual outcome will not, perhaps, be a mutual understanding, but at least the understanding of the other party's 'axioms'. And that is the first step to mutual understanding.

In passing, one could here posit a question whether Westerners need any other culture? Or, similarly, can Muslims (or representatives of any other culture for that matter) do without any other culture? To cut the discussion short, as every student of genetics or biology knows,

inbreeding of a genetically homogenous group of specimens inevitably leads to the decline of the species. By analogy, on the cultural / civilisational level, inbreeding within any culture brings about its gradual decay. It is even impossible to conceive of such an exlcusivist, inbred culture. The richest cultures have always assimilated lots of foreign traits to such an extent that the 'culture users' are no longer aware of such influences, because these have been seamlessly integrated.

It turns out, in addition, that first-level rationality as the common public domain leads to the idea of 'minimum conflict and maximum neutrality' by establishing some common conceptual framework and by bringing the conflicting sides to the 'round table'.

Of course, this is the ideal situation, and there is an infinite gradation of its shades. In addition, its preconditions are some basic tolerance as well as mutual trust and confidence that 'the other' will not undermine 'our' way of life by force of stratagem.

However, I am afraid Williams's first, weakest thesis, viz. 'there are no current values that could help solve every conflict of values', indeed holds valid, for there are conflicts of values conceivable in which even the *rationale paradigm* and first-level rationality are missing.

The only possible answer to such a quandary seems *education* and gradual insemination of rationality as a separate value. It should be emphasised that what is meant here is actual *education*, not training or schooling. Alas, modern systems of education, including universities and other academic institutions provide less and less education in the true sense of a discipline that should first and foremost teach students how to think critically and understand a phenomenon in an unbiased way. Instead, they produce large number of specialists trained in various unrelated skills needed in commercial affairs, and predominant values take recourse to economic thinking, as if all other values, including knowledge and education, could be reduced to economic values. Another educational model, that proves counterproductive when it comes to intercultural dialogue, is most commonly found in backward, exclusively religious schools and madrasas. Efforts to reshape local systems of education are essential for genuine dialogue.

The failure, however, to embark on a dialogue can be of grave consequences.

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