RATIONALITY AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

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A New Rationality or New Rationalities?

The so-called Western-type of rationality is linked to a myth which is deeply rooted in the overall spirit of our civilisation. Simply defined, that myth tells us that for every decision-making situation, there exists only one best choice and, consequently, only that choice should be regarded as rational or optimal. This highly abstract point of view about rational choice may be called a position of substantial rationality.

On the other hand, everybody knows that rational choice is dependent upon at least three determinants which regularly have a substantial influence on the decision-making process. The first is the need for a relatively clear, isolated and defined field of rational observation. The second is the influence of a value system which is an integrated element in any human action regarded as functional, such as rational choice. The third is the influence of specific circumstances under which some rational choice is made, such as shortage of time, lack of information, or conditions of uncertainty. The scientific authorities who pay the greatest attention to these conditions could be regarded as rational relativists or promoters of bounded rationality. They tell us that we never deal with the best rational choices and consequently our attention has to be focused on adequate decisions, as well as measuring and anticipating their side-effects.

These apparently opposed theoretical standpoints are, in fact, parts of the same concept: monistic or functional rationality. As opposed to this, our world is living in a state of permanent conflict between these opposed and unfriendly rationalities, economic, political, cultural, environmental etc. Every one of them has developed specific theoretical and practical approaches and forms of action, different institutions, elites and subjects for the promotion of its aims and measures, as well as formal and informal ways and techniques to impose its interests and purposes. As a natural consequence of the anthropocentric concept of life, human beings are seen solely as beings of projection and self-realisation. The only limits to human interest and actions are the actions and acts of other human beings. We find the same analogy in the division of particular segments of human reality represented by the scopes of different disciplines. The ways of functioning, and internal rationality, of different segments of human totality find limits to, and corrections of, their statements, aims and results, only from the functioning of different, or opposing, segments of life and internal rationalities. What is on one level rational, on another is irrational and vice versa. Development has been seen merely as some kind of, more or less, successful social compromise.

It is paradoxical but true that the idea of the possible collapse of bios sends us back for systemic or discrete rationality, so characteristic of the cultures of the past, which most Western scholars have regarded traditionally as irrational or non-rational. All those cultures find wholeness in the world as made and created and try to build up and organise all varieties of human spiritual and practical actions, in accordance with specific notions of the universe. On the contrary, the specificity of modern Western civilisation lies in its attitude that the essence of the world should be created and produced.

The well-known and final consequences of one dominant concept of development, based primarily on a balance of conflicts, bring us back to the old-new paradigm of the self-organising universe. The most important task of our time is to develop the methodological tools to understand the totality of the world of life, and to aim at preserving our existence as a part of it. For the first time in history the overall crisis of life makes us able to realise that the ultimate aim of all humankind is to preserve and to promote the totality and variety of bios.

Finally, if we ask once again: Rationality or rationalities? The answer is: rationalities, but always corresponding to and in accordance with, the oldest, unique and interdependent rationality of life which is an obligatory one.

Human, Social or Cultural Capital?

One thing certain is that it is possible to cope with systemic problems only by using systemic approaches, capabilities and sources. Developments oriented toward bios are predominantly dependent upon using so-called, non-material, symbolic or systemic forms of capital. The answer to the eternal question that asks who the real subject of change is - the individual, the group or the society - will, of course, be logically connected with preference for the treatment and interconnection of human, social and cultural capital, as three basic types of symbolic
capital.

According to Coleman, human capital is created by changing people so as to give them skills and capabilities that enable them to act in new ways. Social capital, in turn, is created when relationships among groups of people change in ways that facilitate action. And finally, cultural capital is created according to the ability of a society to act in unison in order to fulfil certain aims and tasks. If the question of preserving and promoting bios is to be addressed, all these three forms of non-material capital, embodied in every human being and humankind as a whole, have to be combined and interconnected.

In other words we need, at the same time, a new type of individual, group and society, which means that we have to develop virtually new skills, sensibilities and ways of thinking and acting. On an individual level, the most important factor for change is dependent upon new bio-oriented education; on a group level, the most important is the ability to build up coherent and obligatory sets of founded bio-norms and principles and, on the level of societies, consensus is crucial in accordance with bio-oriented paradigms of development.

Homo Economicus, Homo Sociologicus or Homo Biologicus?

The two dominant orientations (models) in contemporary social sciences are theories of methodological individualism and theories of methodological holism. The first is mainly characteristic of economics; the second, conversely, of sociology. A radical version of methodological individualism can be found in the model of Homo economicus, which considers that only individual behaviour, by following autonomous interests, can create and make social reality. A radical version of methodological holism, embodied in the model of Homo sociologicus, advocates instead that only the pressure of norms and social reality determines the behaviour of individuals.

Bridging the gap between these two orientations is undoubtedly one of the very clear efforts which more closely connect different scientific disciplines in the field of the social sciences. What often remains forgotten is the fact that both individual and society are also biological entities and integral parts of the world of life. That does not mean that the developmental problems of our world will be solved in an easy way through the development of the third model, Homo biologicus as an additional and corrective model with the role of presenting theories of environmental sciences.

This means that we have to leave the theoretical and practical predominance of the first two theoretical concepts, but not in favour of the third one. The extremes and isolationist nature of the first two orientations could be resolved only by integrating the dimension of bios as a unique, fundamental and universal dimension of the world, from which any developmental model has to be derived.

Networks and Networking Oriented toward Bios

Planetary and global determinants are increasingly losing their geographical significance and assuming an axiological, biopolitical and developmental significance. The late 20th century is characterised by multi-dependence, combination, and polymatricity, as against the old bi-polarity, centredness and compactness. The survival of our world and of ourselves as human beings depends, therefore, in the first place on our ability to grasp and deal with the complexity of the overall world of life.

As a logico-organisational-social and static-dynamic structure, the network is best suited to meeting the requirements of such a world. On the one hand, networks usually have a very high degree of formal and functional transparency and clarity which makes them, in terms of their communicativeness, easily recognisable and open. On the other hand, their relatively firm but transformable structure does not preclude the transfer of different contents along unexpected paths within the network infrastructure.

It is necessary to connect people, initiatives, projects and institutions which are clearly active in the establishment of new and systemic ways of thinking and acting. This type of action is always oriented toward the preservation and promotion of bios. The late 1980's brought onto the international developmental scene, the East-West relationship, in addition to the already present North-South relationship. The contemporary world is torn between these two axes, each of which opens up both an abyss of questions and anxieties and a wealth of answers and opportunities. The future of bios lies in our ability to understand the infinite simultaneous interplay of difference and connection. If we are able to understand that interplay, we are - or we shall be - able to understand and promote the complexity of life.

References


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