THE MORAL ORDER OF MODERN SOCIETIES, MORAL COMMUNICATION AND INDIRECT MORALISING

by

THOMAS LUCKMANN

Delivered at Collegium Budapest

March 3, 1997

Public Lectures No. 17

April 1997

ISSN 1217 - 582X ISBN 963 8463 62 7

Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study

H-1014 Budapest Szentháromság utca 2. Tel:(36-1) 244-8300 Fax:(36-1) 224-8310
http://www.colbud.hu

The Moral Order of Modern Societies, Moral Communication and Indirect Moralising*

I. Introduction

It may be useful to begin with a brief clarification of the two main terms I shall use in my observations on morality in modern societies. I consider ***morality*** as a reasonably coherent set of notions of what is right and what is wrong, beyond the pulls and pushes of the current situation and above the immediate gratification of one's desires. The notions in question, although held by individuals, are not of subjective origin: they are inter-subjectively constructed, and socially selected, maintained, and transmitted. In this way, they come to form historical traditions of distinct conceptions of the good life. 'Reasonably coherent' does not necessarily imply that they constitute an integrated system: the degree to which the moral view of life is dogmatically articulated depends upon the presence of moral entrepreneurs and moral experts in the society; it also depends on the kind of experts involved in its systematisation: prophets, theologians, philosophers, educationists, and so on.

Whenever a view concerning the good life is articulated, and the path to that ideal is marked out, the foundations for the moral order of a society are laid. This implies that some conceptions of what is right and what is wrong become canonised, while others are censored. If thereupon the true path to the moral life comes to be defined as the general criterion of action in the organisation of collective life, and deviations from it are punished, the ***moral order*** of a society becomes established. The task of enforcing the moral order may be diffused throughout the society's institutions or it may be concentrated in a particular set of those institutions.

---

* This paper evolved from lectures given at the 4th Biennial Congress of the Nordic Semiotic Association in Imatra, Finland, June 1996 and in the Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, in September of the same year. Earlier versions were given in 1995 as lectures at the University of Erlangen, Germany, and at the Universities of Vienna and Salzburg, Austria. See also my 'Über Moral und moralische Kommunikation in der modernen Gesellschaft', in ***Sociologia Internationalis***, 34/1 (Berlin 1996), pp. 1–11.

It may be useful at this point if I make clear what I mean by 'communication'. The term is not used to refer to processes taking place between organisms, much less between cells. Nor do I have in mind inner speech. Moreover, I consider it misleading to designate, as some do, some large-scale processes which take place between social or cultural systems as 'communication'. I restrict my use of the term to processes based on socially constructed sign systems, particularly but not exclusively, human language. These processes – social (inter)actions of a special kind – are essential to the organisation of collective ***human*** life; they are especially important in making possible the effective transmission of the traditions of a society, including those of its moral order.

The communication processes may be reciprocal or unilateral; they may be direct, face-to-face, or mediated in any number of ways. They may occur between individuals. Individuals as individuals or as representatives of offices, groups or socially defined categories of individuals, may address themselves to other individuals or offices, groups and socially defined categories of individuals. Generally, persons communicate with one another primarily as persons. However, communication between them can take place also – primarily or even exclusively – in terms of categories relevant to, or salient in, the communication process; furthermore, communication may be between fully anonymous senders and equally anonymous receivers.

Finally, I should quickly point out, in view of my lecture's inclusive title, that I do not intend to take up a number of weighty issues which could, and perhaps should, be raised whenever morality is discussed. Among the most important of these is the ***source*** of morality. Does it originate in a universal aspect of the human condition? Is it fed by pre-human springs? Or is it the wholly variable product of historical conditions and changing social constructions; and if that be the case, does it imply that morality should also be seen in the perspective of radical historical relativism?

However, should the answer be that morality does spring from a universal and perhaps ancient source in the ***conditio humana,*** is it possible to map that source with some degree of accuracy? These are not new questions. They have been raised since the early days of philosophy and

various answers were given to them in the tradition begun by Plato and Aristotle, a tradition that went through various phases, even fashions (historical relativism was one such), and which certainly did not come to an end with Nietzsche's reflections on the genealogy of morals. To repeat: I shall not discuss these questions here. Nonetheless, my observations on the nature of morality in modern societies cannot but rest upon certain ontological and epistemological assumptions. These are directly linked to the elementary problems of moral philosophy, and consequently I feel obliged to indicate briefly their nature.[1]

There ***is*** a universal source of morality in the human condition. It is fed by deeper springs which are buried in its oldest strata – strata that may even antedate hominisation.[2] The phenomenon in question, the reciprocity of perspectives, is a peculiar trait of human sociality.[3] Human sociality has many preconditions, the most important of which is human ***subjectivity*** with its elementary emotional repertoire, and its ability to discover meaning in the most ordinary actions in everyday existence and to instil it into the big projects of life. But it is the principle of the reciprocity of perspectives which is specifically presupposed in the interactive constitution of morality. It is constitutive of intersubjectivity and thus, indirectly, also of the diverse intersubjective constructions of morality which constitute the foundation of the historical moral order of human societies. In sum, this principle is the foundation upon which the edifice of an entire world is built – a world inhabited by others like ourselves.

These introductory remarks serve to define the basic terms of my argument and to sketch its ontological and epistemological frame. I shall now turn to the topic of the present lecture: the nature of morality in modern societies. I shall begin at the end: that is, I will briefly formulate the outcome of

---

[1] For an elaboration of this, see my contribution to the ***Festschrift*** for Maurice Natanson, 'On the Intersubjective Constitution of Morals'***,*** in S. Galt Crowell (ed.), ***The Prism of the Self***, Dordrecht-Boston-London, 1995, pp. 73–91.

[2] A recent and powerful argument for this view is presented by Frans de Waal, ***Good Natured. The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals***, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1996.

[3] See Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, ***The Structures of the Life-world***, I, Evanston, Ill., 1973 (London, etc., 1974), p. 59ff.

my argument before developing it step by step. Knowing the end should make it easier to follow the steps which lead to it. The sequence of these steps begins with a short presentation of the well-known views of morality in classical sociological theory. I then point out a number of problems inherent in these views and try to show how they can be resolved. Finally, I offer a hypothesis of sorts concerning the dominant style of moral communication in modern societies, and what it may tell us about their moral order.

II. The Dissolution of the Traditional Moral Order

According to the main sociological theories, morality has largely disappeared from the social structure of modern societies. The system of modern institutions – or at least the great dominant institutions of modern society: the economy and the state – obeys functional norms that are in effect, although not necessarily in their rhetoric, emancipated from the traditional moral order. Another assumption has been stated less frequently and explicitly: given that morality has been eliminated from the social structure, it may also be taken for granted that it has vanished from society at large.

However, even if one accepts that the principal diagnosis is essentially correct, the corresponding assumption is by no means self-evident. I maintain that everyone with eyes to see and ears to listen will find overwhelming evidence of the continuing presence of morality in contemporary societies: in the different social interactions in which we are involved every day, we encounter it almost everywhere. It may not be the kind of morality which moral entrepreneurs of various sorts would like us to have, but it ***is*** morality nonetheless. However, the term ***morality*** used in the singular is too definitive and prejudges the issue: instead of 'morality' I would therefore say 'morality or moralities', the main social location of which is to be found in communicative processes rather than in the institutions of the social structure.

In a last step I shall present the notion that in modern society there has been a marked shift in the dominant style of moral communication. This shift is in the direction of a preference for indirect moralising. While the evidence

which may be brought forward in support of this notion is not quite as overwhelming as the evidence for the continuing presence of morality in the form of moralising, it has a fairly high degree of plausibility, particularly in combination with the good theoretical grounds that may also be credited to it.

I should now like to put in historical perspective the reasons both for ***accepting*** the classical sociological assertion that morality has largely disappeared from the social structure, and for ***refusing*** to accept the corresponding assumption that, in consequence, morality has entirely disappeared from society.

Simplifying a little, it may be said that in archaic societies religion, morality and law (to the extent that one may speak of law in the absence of written codices) had a common basis in the social structure. As an eminent anthropologist of an older generation put it,[4] such societies were marked by ***primitive fusion.*** At the very least, the different social institutions were very closely co-ordinated, particularly those institutions that served religious, moral and legal functions. At the heart of the moral order of every society there was a clearly articulated conception of the good life. This general conception was made specific in terms of a wide range of behavioural 'dos and don'ts'. Contraventions of the moral order were clearly defined. Because life in archaic and, to a large extent, in traditional society ran its course in small communities breaches of the moral order were clearly visible whenever they occurred, as were the punishments, which were of various degrees of severity. The overall significance of the moral order was plausibly legitimated by systematic reference to a transcendent sacred universe. This remained the case even when morality and religion were no longer considered to be one and the same thing: whether the code of right and wrong was rigid or tolerant – there was some variation in this regard – it was generally obligatory.

It is obvious that in modern societies a moral order of this kind does not exist; nor are its features even distantly approximated. How did this come about?

---

[4] Robert Redfield.

In the course of Near Eastern and Western history, the moral, religious and legal functions of collective life tended increasingly toward organisation in separate, rather specialised institutions: the codification of rules of conduct and misconduct in the form of law – as, for example, in the Code of Hammurabi, generally considered a momentous advance in civilisation – is a case in point. Yet such codes were not (yet) fully detached from the sacred universe. Law remained holy to varying degrees, at least until the promulgation of the ***Code Napoléon***. All in all, during the earlier phases of the process of institutional differentiation, morals continued to be institutionally attached to religious institutions.

Nonetheless, as the pace of differentiation of the political, economic and legal functions of social life which has characterised Western societies since the late Middle Ages accelerated, the process spared neither religion nor the moral order. After many ups and downs it eventually resulted in the societies we know today. Furthermore, although religious institutions remained the social-structural basis of the moral order for a long period, they too were subject to institutional specialisation and were increasingly restricted to what was considered their proper function. After losing their role in the polity and the economy, what was left was the family, and what was invented (or re-invented for general use) was the individual soul.

As a consequence, the socially and morally disciplining force of religious institutions tended to decrease from one period to another. The complex cultural and structural transformations to which the simplifying labels 'Enlightenment' and 'Industrial Revolution' are customarily attached, accelerated the process, temporarily sparing only what lay at the periphery of modernisation. Both religion and morals became increasingly individualised and, first in the case of religion, and subsequently (and even more contradictorily with regard to its essential function) in the case of morals, privatised. In a long and complex process of social and cultural history, both religion and morals thus took an inward turn. After losing their social-structural home in the big institutional edifices, they kept their lease on the small chamber of individual subjectivity. Religion was transformed into mere private faith, and

morality into subjective conscience, with the individual as their solitary habitation.

Almost a century ago, Durkheim expressed concern about the slowness with which organic solidarity – the term he gave to the moral order which he thought would become the integrating force for societies with a complex division of labour – was replacing the traditional moral order associated with simpler societies – those with a mechanical division of labour.[5] His concern is understandable: to the end, Durkheim retained his conviction that a society without a moral order at its core could not survive for any great length of time.

Nearly fifty years later, another sociologist, Theodor Geiger – an important part of whose thought and writings was devoted to the study of the functions and consequences of law in the regulation of collective life – took a similar diagnosis as his point of departure,[6] but only to arrive at an entirely different conclusion. Like Durkheim, he took it for granted that modern societies may be characterised by the dissolution of a homogeneous obligatory moral order. In his view, however, this was not one of the deplorable consequences of functional differentiation, but a necessary condition of the evolution of modern society. A generally obligatory and behaviourally specific moral order appeared to Geiger to be incompatible with a rationally organised, functionally differentiated modern society. According to him, the retreat of morality from the social structure would not necessarily make morality disappear completely. However, the condition of its survival was that it should become socially irrelevant and, to use his term, spiritualised.

---

5 Emile Durkheim, ***De la division du travail social***, Paris, 1893; and ***Le suicide***, Paris, 1897.
6 Theodor Geiger, ***Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts***, Copenhagen, 1947.

III. The Persistence of Morality-in-use

Durkheim's and Geiger's belief that modern societies no longer possess a generally obligatory moral order is shared by most contemporary social scientists. A great deal of evidence speaks in support of this view, and there is little doubt that it must be accepted as basically correct. However, their conclusions about the consequences of this state of affairs are another matter entirely.

I think that Durkheim was wrong to postulate that no society, not even complex modern society, could exist without the integrating force of a specific, and at the same time generally obligatory, moral code. I also think that Geiger's assumption that the rational organisation of differentiated institutions in modern social structures not only could well do ***without*** such a moral order, but would be, in fact, only impeded by it, makes sense. But he is wrong on another important issue. Using Geiger's metaphor, one may say with some degree of plausibility that morality ***retreated*** from the social structure. One may also accept his notion that the type of morality that could best survive in a situation in which it must make do without an institutional home is a kind of ***Gesinnungsethik***: that is, an ethics of subjective disposition and motivation rather than a traditional ethics of responsibility and accountability. It could be that the latter is somewhat antiquated in a society in which most 'dos and don'ts' have become codified in a vast system of positive law. But I do not think that even such antiquated – if that is what they are – moral elements have entirely disappeared. There is even less reason to accept Geiger's assertion that whatever morality remained evaporated into the thin air of a purely spiritual sphere.

I have now come to the next step in my argument. I suggest that another possibility with respect to the fate of morals in the modern world is considerably more likely. Morality was always a constitutive dimension of concrete, face-to-face social interactions – what Goffman called the ***interaction order.*** That is what it was both in societies in which it had no special institutional basis of its own, and in societies in which it had such a basis. I suggest that, after it had lost its impressive institutional edifice in the form of

the moral order of a traditional society, it retreated, as it were, to its permanent old home. The dissolution of the traditional, institutionally established moral order in the contemporary world did not cause it to disappear from the moral dimension of the ***interaction order***.

To formulate this more plainly: historically, what came first was what I should like to call ***morality-in-use***, from which more elaborate moral institutions gradually emerged. Without doubt, in the ancient civilisations morally significant notions and concepts were built into complex systems of morality. These had their canons and catechisms, and were infused into the institutional norms of the entire social structure. Eventually, they developed a structural basis of their own in religious-moral institutions. The emergence of such a cultural superstructure and such an organisational basis did not, however, entail the disappearance of practical morality from the life-blood of every society: its interaction order. It did mean that ***morality-in-use,*** the moral dimension of situated social interaction, was influenced by the higher, institutionally established level of morality. Evidently, the degree of influence varied historically, depending on the plausibility and diffusion of an elevated moral rhetoric and a moral vocabulary of motives, and on the degree of institutional enforcement of its dogmas and catechisms.

It is certainly true that, in modern societies, homogeneous, unitary moral orders of this kind are no longer firmly embedded in the social structure. The efforts of various fundamentalist moral-religious enterprises to re-establish some such order (naturally, in accordance with ***their*** conception of it) have not had any notable long-term success. Nor is it likely that they will ever achieve their goal, as long as the basic features of modern society do not change beyond recognition.

It is just as true, however, that notions of good and bad, and of right and wrong are still relevant to the conduct of life and, concretely, to the planning, execution, and evaluation of one's own actions and those of other people. Although a dogmatic hierarchy of values containing canonic conceptions of the good life is no longer ***uniformly*** transmitted and enforced by some institutional apparatus, ***some*** notions of right and wrong are still passed on by various channels, such as – most visibly and importantly – intermediary

institutions. These begin with the family and peer groups, and ***may*** include local branches of larger societal groups, associations, and institutions such as civic organisations, clubs, and religious congregations, as well as schools, seminars and academies. Intermediary institutions are also the main source of at least partial enforcement of such moralities in the interaction order. In short, modern societies also have their own brands of ***moralities-in-use.***

When we complain about others or accuse them of misdeeds of one kind or another; when we apologise for our own actions and faults; when we become indignant and invite others to join in our indignation; when we pronounce maxims and quote proverbs; when we provide or seek advice; and when we gossip, preach, and swear; we engage in explicit or implicit moral communication. In so doing, we are proving to others, as they are demonstrating to us, that some kind of morality is still practised everywhere.

In the first of a series of investigations my colleagues and I devoted our efforts to the description and analysis of the most important ***forms*** employed in the concrete processes of moral communication.[7] We thought that an approach close to the realities of everyday life would lead us to the substantive aspects of modern morality. In fact, we found many forms, formats, and genres of moral communication, and learned quite a lot about the moral sense articulated in these forms. We were able to arrive at a preliminary outline of the repertoire of moral communication in contemporary German society. Some, if not all the observed features would probably find their analogue in other, comparable societies.

If any evidence above and beyond our own intuition and observation as practising members of our societies were needed in order to reach the conclusion that the prophecies of doom concerning the general decline and destruction of morals in modern society are wrong, the data collected in these investigations should amply provide it. Morality is in use all around us. However, in one respect at least a profound change cannot be denied. The evidence – as anticipated in classical sociological theory – supports the view

that there is no single and uniform morality in modern society. What is in use by us and others like us are ***moralities***. It remains an open question whether these different moralities contain something like a common moral ***deep grammar.***

A few words about the nature of the data may be in order. They consist of hundreds of hours of recordings of family table talks, both from the south and the east of Germany; religious and secular conversion stories; gossip in informal and institutional settings; emergency calls to a fire department; professional family, sexual, and genetic counseling sessions; admission interviews in psychiatric wards; various kinds of radio phone-in programmes; meetings of local ecology groups; public debates (on the Gulf War, for example) both ***in vivo*** and on television; religious television series; a regional anti-smoking campaign; public speeches and addresses (for example, by the President of the German Federal Republic at year's end, and by various public figures at the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz); and so on. These materials are as rich as they are voluminous.

However, it should be noted that, with the exception of a few American and Chinese examples, they are restricted to Germany, the bulk of the data being from the south of the country. The family table talks – an important source for our analysis of forms and genres in face-to-face communication – are from lower- middle and middle-class families only, and none of them had small children. While these limitations have little bearing on the validity of the assertion that morality-in-use is pervasive in modern society, questions on the distribution of the styles and repertoires of moral communication and, ***a fortiori,*** questions about the differences and similarities of moral sense, cannot be answered with certainty, even with regard to Germany; and assertions about other, generally comparable societies must, at present, remain rather speculative.

---

7 These investigations were sponsored by the German Science Foundation. A related study of moral communication in intermediary institutions is being supported by the Bertelsmann Foundation.

IV. Moralising Indirectly

What is indirect moralising? How does it differ from direct moral communication? The best way to begin answering these questions is the concrete presentation of a few typical examples of indirect moralising, contrasting them with other forms of moral communication. In order to achieve a better understanding of the examples – and beyond that, of the argument about indirect moralising – we must first clarify our terminology.

One must distinguish between the ***thematisation*** of morals and ***moralising***. Thematisation may be free of moralising, while moralising need not – though it may – use thematisation. Thematisation ranges from the use of explicitly moral examples to abstract formulations. Moralising is either positive or negative, and it consists of the evaluation of both one's own actions and the actions of others. One may get the impression from our sets of data that the latter is the preferred moralising activity. The communicative ***addressees*** may at the same time be the ***objects*** of moralising, or they may be the ***recipients*** of moralising about others.

The ***methods*** of moralising may be ***linguistic*** in the narrow sense of the term: semantic-lexical, prosodic, and rhetorical. In addition to these – or standing by themselves – the methods employed may be paralinguistic, mimetic, and gestural.

Furthermore, some ***genres*** which may or may not have a primary moral function – for example, maxims and proverbs – may be used as formula-like components of moralising communication.

Finally, moralising may vary in general ***style:*** it is either ***direct***: in the form of praise or complaint, accusation, indignation, and so on; or it may be ***indirect***: for example, in the form of litotes, questions, 'if/then' formulations, certain kinds of teasing, and gossip.

Examples

I. Thematisation of Morals

Bus Example

21	Bu:	h' yeah then (1.5) well I've learned in Western culture
22		one should always be ACTIVE (0.2)
23		and eh I also AGREE to that
24		I find (0.8) the activity of a person very important,
25		yeah, (0.5) but HERE (0.2) it is different (0.2)
26		the MORE PASSIVE you are the better.
27		(0.2) yeah (0.2) actually one doesn't say passive but'
28		(0.2) QUIET yes one has to remain QUIET
29		NOT say anything, hm'be contented with (0.8) own
30		situation with life, one should not have any wishes,
31		(0.2) but being QUIET (-) this is emphasised very much.
32		(1.5)

II. Direct Moralising

20	D:	I hätt eh koi Zeit meh;
20		***I haven't got time anymore;***
21	D:	Zum Turne.
21		***for gymnastics.***
22	U:	Puuh, du fängsch au alles bloß an und hörsch's
22		***Puuh, you always only start things and then stop***
23		wieder-auf.
23		***again.***

III. Indirect Moralising

III.1 'Why' constructions

Telefonauskunft

The Telephone Operator

S. calls directory enquiries and asks for the telephone number of a family called 'Weisser' in Constance.

12 A: ich hab keine Familie WEISSER in Konstanz.
12 ***I have no family WEISSER in Constance.***
13 nur eine Familie WEISS.
13 ***only a family WEISS***
14 S: ja. die wohnen glaub ich auf der Reichenau
14 ***yes I think they live on the Reichenau***
15 und gar nicht direkt in Konstanz.
15 ***and actually not directly in Constance***
16 A: (barscher Ton) WARUM sagen Sie dann KONSTANZ.
16 ***(brusquely) WHY did you say CONSTANCE then***
17 S: tut mir leid. ich dachte die Reichenau fällt unter KONSTANZ.
17 ***I am sorry I thought the Reichenau belongs to CONSTANCE***
18 (2.5)
18
19 A: also die Nummer ist
19 ***well then the number is***

III.2 'I don't understand' Constructions

Antje & Paul

1 A: naja gut, aber des nützt dir jetzt NIX wenn[du da]
1 ***OK good, but it doesn't get you anywhere if you***
2 P: [haja]
2
3 P: des nützt mir jetzt natürlich NIX aber=
3 ***it won't get me anywhere but***
4 A: =dran (denkscht). jetzt musch mal erscht mal kucken

4 ***if you think about now you just have to first of all see***

5 wie du deine Sache g'regelt kriegsch

5 ***how you can get your stuff put in order***

6 hh i versteh'i versteh jetzt au net

6 ***hh I eh'I don't understand I don't understand either***

7 warum daß du net diesen Dingsbums anrufsch in Stuttgart

7 ***why you just don't call whatchamacallhim in Stuttgart***

8 und SAGSCH wenn du: jetzt no en Praxissemeschter MASCH,

8 ***and say that when you do your practical semester now,***

9 dann würdsch gern im nächsten Semester wieder

9 ***that you then would like to – next semester continue***

10 in Stuttgart weiterMACHE.

10 ***in Stuttgart again***

11 (mal) erzähle dem was da LOS isch.

11 ***tell him what's going on***

12 P: du i'i krieg koi Praxissemesterstell mehr

12 ***I'm not gonna get a practical semester position any more***

III.3 Reconstructions (direct /indirect example)

HU3

86 Hu: dann hat der d'die der der damalige Parteisekretär (-) [ja']

86 ***then the secretary of the party at that time ya***

87 S: [mhm]

88 Hu: mich ja zur Re[de] gestellt ja.

88 ***confronted me***

89 S: [mhm] (. . .)

97 Hu: anderen ja damals dann, hat misch ja zur

97 ***other people then, wanted to***

98 Rede gestellt, WARUM ja – HANDELN s sie

98 ***confronted me. WHY don't you ACT***

99 ja nicht wie die anderen wie Ihre' Kommilitonen

99 ***like the others like your fellow students***

100 WARUM ja, – mußt du – eh'm' müssen Sie sich

100 ***WHY must you do you always have to***

101 immer HERAUSPUTZEN

101 ***dress up so fancy***

102 S: ((empörte Stimme)) / ah ja:::! /

102 ***((filled with indignation)) oh yeah***

III.4 Litotes

Wir Deutschen

we Germans

42 H: WIR DEUTSCHE +des muß man nämlich auch mal sehen+

42 ***we Germans you have to look at it this way sometimes***

43 benehmen uns auch *nicht immer ganz richtig.*

43 ***don't always behave in just the right way***

44 es ist NICHT immer ganz gut.

44 ***it's not always very good***

III.5 Overall Indirectness Constructions

Genetic counselling

23 KM: (. . .) möchten wir gern selber Kinder haben.

23 ***we would like to have children ourselves***

24 KM: wir haben Kinder an sich gern: ich hab's gern und meine Frau

24 ***we actually like children: I like them and my wife***

25 B: hm.hm. haja. ich meine, also ich würde* eigentlich

25 ***I think, well, I would actually***

26 KM: glaub ich

26 ***I think***

27 B: keinen Grund darin sehen, daß man da (4.0) aus dem Grund _ dann

27 ***see no reason that one would for that reason***

28 KM: hm.

29 B: verzichtet, das-

29 ***go without children***

30 KM: hm. (7.0) das war an sich jetzt interessant da die . . .

OTHER FORMS OF INDIRECTNESS AND OBLIQUENESS

1) ***euphemisms***: 'just a bit misplaced'
'with litotes not quite diplomatic'
(in situ and reconstructed)
2) ***disfluences***: false starts, reformulations (in situ)
3) ***jocular modulations***: (in situ)
4) ***prosodic devices***: (complaining tone, brusque tone, etc.)

The unsatisfactory nature of the evidence notwithstanding, there are good theoretical reasons for assuming that, in the course of the past few generations, a shift has occurred in the preferred style of moralising. We have seen that whereas a generally obligatory and reasonably uniform moral order is absent from modern societies, there is still a pervasive set of moralities-in-use. The latter consist of the evaluation by individual members of various groups and milieus of the conduct of other members. However, ***outside*** the ***home*** groups and milieus there will be considerable uncertainty whether the criteria of evaluation are shared with the members of other groups and milieus.

To be sure, some differences in moral orientation existed even in traditional societies with their fairly homogeneous moral orders. As a consequence, there was probably some interactive – more specifically, moral and moralising – uncertainty in all but the simplest archaic communities, although the structure of social interaction in the little communities of traditional society minimised such uncertainty. In the more complex patterns of social interaction in the traditional old civilisations, especially in their urban segments, individuals who did not know each other, or who did not know each other well, could not entirely avoid the risk of moral uncertainty. But when situations arose under which they came to interact for one purpose or another with relative strangers, the risk could be kept at a rather low level, as long as

they could perceive each other under well-defined, outwardly marked social categories. In traditional societies, these categories carried a great deal of information concerning a person's moral status. Furthermore, one could also accept the risk of moral conflict when dealing with actual or potential moral deviants.

In modern life, in contrast, interactional, moral, and moralising uncertainty is prevalent outside an individual's own ***home*** group or milieu. In societies with an obligatory and uniform moral order – these are typically societies in which interaction based on anonymous social roles was non-existent or infrequent – moral homogeneity between individuals could be assumed until concrete evidence to the ***contrary*** appeared in interaction. With only slight exaggeration, one may say that in modern societies the opposite is the case: moral homogeneity cannot be assumed until positive evidence is produced in its favour.

The conclusion which we may draw from these premises is obvious. In modern societies, interaction outside narrowly functional, highly anonymous social roles – interaction for which a certain degree of moral homogeneity is required or even essential – is inherently risky for persons who do not know each other well. Obviously, under such conditions the specific form of communicative interaction which carries the greatest risk of moral uncertainty and potential conflict is ***direct*** moralising. Other things being equal, this aspect of modern life is likely to encourage a strong preference for an ***indirect*** style of moral communication. More precisely: such a style will be preferred in all communication ***outside*** the ***home*** milieus of the individuals concerned. Furthermore, one might speculate that under some conditions this style would become diffused into moral communication from extraterritorial into home milieus.

It is important to remember that indirect moralising did not emerge first in modern society. But it appears that in various types of non-modern societies such a style arose only under special conditions and only in particular milieus, and that it was limited to a few kinds of communicative situation. In modern societies, on the other hand, it seems to have come to mark most 'inter-milieu' communication and, as I have speculated, it is not

entirely unlikely that this style has also spread beyond the interactional domain in which its adoption was favoured by structural causes into much 'intra-milieu' moralising.

It should also be kept in mind that the hypothesis about the predominance of indirect moralising does not imply that in modern societies no one moralises directly any more. It is plausible to reason that in groups and milieus in which moral homogeneity can be assumed by the participants in communicative interaction, that there are no grounds to prefer indirect moralising, and that such a style will be employed only if it diffuses into these groups or milieus for other reasons. At present, one may do little more than speculate on these matters: unfortunately, the broad range of data necessary for the mapping out of the repertoires of different communicative milieus according to the predominance of direct and indirect styles of moralising is not yet available. But speculate we may.

In non-modern societies, families (of various structural types) were communities of life in which a fairly high degree of moral homogeneity prevailed or could be at least assumed to prevail by those in a position of authority in these highly asymmetrical social relationships. In modern society, this is no longer the case; and while a certain amount of direct moralising is likely to occur wherever asymmetrical relationships still prevail (for example**,** between adults and very young children) and between peers who know each other well, indirect moralising will probably be preferred.

Communities of life such as the family are no longer necessarily communities of like-minded people. But at the same time, various kinds of such communities ***(Gesinnungsgemeinschaften)*** have proliferated in modern societies. Interactional risks of the kind we have described do not, of course, exist in them. It is only in external relations that moral homogeneity cannot be assumed, in which case adherents of moral-ideological communities have two options: either they adopt the prevailing indirect style in order to remain morally inconspicuous, or they accept the risk and engage in direct moralising, thereby shifting gears, as it were, into a form of moral entrepreneurship. However, choice between these options may be open to individual members of ***Gesinnungsgemeinschaften*** only when they are alone in

their interaction with non-members. It is likely that in the external collective activities of moral-ideological communities – at least those of a proselytizing type – the option to remain inconspicuous is not available. The group may expect and demand ***testimony***.

Moreover, in modern societies moral enterprises often do not present themselves as such. In fact, it seems that only the more traditional kinds of ***Gesinnungsgemeinschaften***, especially those of a fundamentalist persuasion, are still willing to declare themselves. It is interesting to note that many of the newer moral-ideological communities follow a different strategy. Many of them erect, for example, scientific, medical, and therapeutic facades. On a structural level, this may be considered a form of indirection.