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ON THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

1. Types of Rationality

Many authors try to distinguish types of rationality but very few of them provide a clear principle for such distinctions. In many cases, they do not even care whether the distinction is a logical division or not. In this part of my paper, I will reconstruct the principles of the distinctions aiming to minimise possible misunderstandings.

Particular types of rationality can be distinguished (1) according to the kind of objects that can be rational (in which case the set that is divided is the range\(^1\) of the concept of rationality), (2) according to the kind of situation in which rationality is attributed to something (in which case we divide the set of these situations), and (3) according to the kind of criteria of rationality (in which case we divide the set of these criteria).

(1) First, in dividing the concept of rationality according to the kind of objects that can be rational, many authors distinguish the rationality of thinking and the rationality of acting. It is easy to agree that this is a logical division of the range of the concept of rationality. The distinction is, of course, based on an enthymematic premise that acting is completely different from thinking; acting is understood here as doing something physical. It is also understood that any human activities other than thinking and acting (like mystical experiences) either do not exist or at least cannot be rational in any sense. Then, and only then, the ranges of both types of rationality are separate and complementary to the range of rationality in general.

\(^1\) The range of a concept is the set of possible designates of this concept. It is thus to be distinguished from an extension of a concept, which is the set of all actual designates of the concept.

Second, we can distinguish the *rationality of values* and the *rationality of knowledge*. However, this is not a logical division of the range of the concept of rationality and these types of rationality are used just to indicate that values can be rational and that the rationality of values differs somehow from the more usual rationality connected with science.

Third, rationality can be divided into *ontic*, *epistemic* and *pragmatic rationality*. Ontic rationality is said to be the rationality of the world as an entity. It is unlike other types of rationality, which are always connected with some human activities. This shows that ontic rationality differs from other types of rationality much more essentially than these other types differ among themselves. Due to the fact that the inclusion of the whole world in the range of rationality seriously affects the meaning of ‘rationality’, changes the proportions among the types of rationality and causes so many doubts and difficulties in the theory of rationality, it is only reasonable to set ontic rationality outside the scope of this work. This is the first reason why the distinction of ontic, epistemic and pragmatic rationality is not a logical division of the range of rationality. The second reason is that the ranges of epistemic and pragmatic rationality are not separate. Epistemic rationality concerns all objects connected with knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, such as statements, theories, methods, but also cognitive acts (like accepting theories, performing experiments, etc.). Pragmatic rationality concerns all objects connected with practical activity, such as the standards of effective action and, of course, cognitive acts, which belong to epistemic rationality as well. Pragmatic rationality covers the scope of rationality of action but is broader, having in its range also thoughts connected with practical activity.

(2) If the concept of rationality is divided according to the kind of situations in which we attribute rationality to something, there is *scientific rationality* and *common-sense rationality*. Here we probably have a logical division of the set of these situations into scientific activity and everyday life, but the ranges (in the technical sense introduced above) of both types of rationality are identical.

(3) The set of criteria of rationality is usually divided in two ways. First, it can be divided according to the relation between the criteria and values (considered axiologically). As a result of such a division, we can distinguish two kinds of rationality: the *rationality of aims* (its criteria refer to values in an essential and non-instrumental way) and the *rationality of means* (in which case criteria are only instrumental because the same sort of things can be judged as rational from the scientific and