

On Universal Morality and the Morality of Universalism

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

Plurality is the condition sine qua non of freedom. And there is no morality without freedom. Adherents of a universalist strategy argue that good people have no use for freedom; that freedom is clamoured for by those bent on making wrong choices. Yet is is unbecoming of adherents of a pluralist strategy to believe the contrary – that freedom is a sufficient guarantee that goodwill be chosen over evil, and that once we take care of freedom, goodness and beauty will take care of themselves. Further, it is wrong to assume that what is chosen does not matter providing it has been chosen freely. Freedom is there to prod responsibility and assist in making good choices.

In a recent programmatic paper 'Against Moral Relativism', Rom Harré [undated] pointed out that 'the postmodern insight, that at any moment an indefinitely large cluster of stories could be told about the human situation then unfolding' is 'disturbing to moral philosophers'; they, moral philosophers, and Harré among them, believe that 'to recover a serious morality arguments must be constructed in defence of some form of moral absolutism'. Harré is not the first and most probably not the last philosopher to declare anxiety in the face of plurality of opinions, and to express the conviction that only elimination of that plurality, or disqualification of all opinions but one, may allow a 'serious morality', that is the proper separation of good from evil.

In voicing such declarations, moral philosophers expressed more than their own professional beliefs. They gave a learned form to the embarrassment of the ordinary men and women bewildered and confused by the need to choose and to bear consequences of that choice – as well as to the strategies of the legislating powers determined to spare them that agony. The sole professional peculiarity of the philosophers' responses to the polyvocality of moral voices is their conviction that getting rid of the agony it causes depends on the 'arguments to be constructed', and that it is the philosophers who are called and predestined to construct them.

That a human being can be human in more than one way and that it is not immediately evident to all which of those ways is preferable, is an offputting,

upsetting and distressing thought. Not because there is something intrinsically odious and repulsive about plurality itself, but because of the vexation it is likely to cause the acting person. The primordial, baseline discomfiture and irritation is that of the uncertainty how to act; plurality breeds a lot of such uncertainty since it means that different people follow different rules and so it is not easy to guess which rule will be applied in response to one's action. Imagine yourself having to take part in a game in which other players follow rules of their own choice and in which there is no telling what those rules are at the moment or are likely to be next – and you will get the inkling of the subliminal anxiety that plurality of the ways of life is able, if not bound, to provoke. For this reason the possibility that many stories may be told about the human situation and that there is no evident way of reducing them to just one story is, indeed, disturbing.

The paradox, though, is that there can be no escape from the agony of choice except through a choice – a choice of strategy; and that none of the strategies one can choose boasts the kind of 'absolute grounding' which will have made the choice between them not truly a choice. The road to non-arbitrary rules leads through an arbitrary decision ...

As long as plurality remains the fact of life, there are conceivably but two principal types of strategies which one can choose from when hoping to mitigate its distressing impact. The boldest, the most thorough and radical, and for that reason the one most obvious to choose, is the strategy to do away with plurality itself, a strategy that aims to replace diversity with sameness and thus to do away either with plurality itself or with its relevance and its 'nuisance power'. The other strategy does not promise quick and radical solutions and therefore it is often denigrated as the sign of capitulation or denounced for not being a strategy at all. In its weaker version, the second strategy assumes that plurality is here to stay; and that, therefore, in order to make human cohabitation possible one needs ground rules for negotiating the moot points and agreeing to disagree while avoiding the dire consequences of disagreement. In its stronger version, the second strategy makes the virtue out of necessity, declares plurality to be good and sets to make the best of it in order to make human cohabitation better.

It is the acceptance of the first strategy which obliges the chooser to invoke the idea of *universalism* – but we can go a step further and say that 'universalism' is that strategy by a different name. Whenever one postulates *universally binding* rules of conduct in general, moral rules in particular, what one says are two things: first, that liking certain rules, being familiar with them or feeling at home in a world cut to their measure are not sufficient reasons to follow them; and that among many competing rules there are some which have other, stronger reasons to support them than erratic human passions or accidents of history, and so stronger claims on human obedience. The trick is

to pass by, ignore or incapacitate the contingencies of passions and history and to go straight to those 'stronger reasons' from which the universal rules may be deduced.

The two assumptions tacitly present in the invocation of 'stronger reasons' are not just an oblique way to define the universal rules; they amount as well to an exercise in division. They divide the realm of rules into the rules worth their name and non-rules or pseudo-rules or 'mere opinions' masquerading as rules. They *assert* as they *disqualify*. The implicit objective of the exercise is to replace the dialogue with a monologue, by denying other participants of the dialogue the rights of the speaking subjects or invalidating in advance the relevance of whatever they may speak about. Like in the ideal objective of Habermas's 'undistorted communication' – the essence of something being 'last' and 'ultimate', the status which universal rules, being universal, have the sole right to claim, is the invalidation of the very possibility of questioning it; and so the cancellation of that uncertainty which made the search desirable, but also possible, in the first place.

Where exactly the 'stronger reasons' may be found is itself a contentious matter, and many suggestions have been made in the long history of philosophical quarrels. But as always in similar cases, the major contention is between *discovery* and *invention*; between *finding out* what are the rules which ought to be universally followed though for some reasons are as yet – time and again, here or there – ignored; and *designing* the rules which because of their own power of persuasion, or some other powers which render ignoring them unlikely, are bound to be universally followed once spelled out. To put it in a different form: the essential quarrel is between the idea that the observed human freedom of choice is a sham or a regrettable deviation from the straight and preordained path, while in fact the universally applicable rules are ready and waiting to be read out and obeyed – and the idea that although human freedom is real and genuine, it needs to be used to choose self-limitation by replacing variety with sameness and so indirectly to deprive itself of its object and work itself out of the job. The first of the two ideas competing in the promotion of universalism of rules is that of *universality*, the second that of *universalisation*.

This has been a shorthand account of the adversary ideas that underlie the positions taken in the debate, not of the tactics the sides use in the actual combat. In those tactics the above-mentioned division all-too-often proves unworkable and is not easy to maintain. As Roland Barthes pointed out many years ago, the substance of all myths is to represent *history* (that is, something human-made and so something that can be un-made or remade by humans) as *nature* (that is, something not of human making and thus something which no human effort may change, let alone undo). The myth of universal rules is no exception. And so on the one hand the protagonists of universality, who

announce the discovery of pre-human, supra-human or otherwise stronger than human rules, still face the fact that their audience must be convinced that discovery is valid; their discoveries need first to be accepted as universal before they become universally binding and so something must be done to bring about this acceptance and make it stay. In other words, the idea of universality will be ineffective – indeed toothless – unless complemented by the tactics of universalisation. On the other hand, however, even the outspoken promoters of *positive* law, that is, of the law explicitly man-made and authoritatively enforced, find themselves obliged to locate the reason for limiting human freedom outside that freedom – and so to present their invention as, in the last resort, a discovery.

This having been said, there is still an important difference between the views deriving human sameness from an underlying unity that precedes all social or individual choices (from ‘divine order’, ‘natural law’ or ‘human essence’), and the views which ground the hope in that sameness in precisely those choices – the laws and the ideas which will eventually make essentially alike all people who are at present, due to the diversity of legislative ideals and habits, fundamentally different. The latter view, we may say, is more akin to the modern spirit, which is marked by the ordering zeal and sees the human condition as a problem rather than a limit imposed in advance upon the legislative freedom; as a task which needs yet to be fulfilled with the help of human wit and resources.

This second view, indeed, prevailed in modern philosophical reflection – much as it pervaded modern political practice. Even when ‘natural law’ was invoked as the ultimate authority, it was always up to the ‘rational law’ to make it operative. Something was always yet to be done to replace discord about values and norms with consensus – and that ‘something’ boiled down in the last account to the institution of the right kind of laws and obtaining obedience to their letter and spirit. Universality was in modern practice the *end product*, an achievement of universalisation, even when in theory it was taken to be and presented as its starting point, justification and the guarantee of its ultimate success.

Nature or reason, ‘natural’ or ‘rational’ law – the quandary haunting all varieties of universalism is always the question of how to select out of the multitude of contradictory ways of life the one and only which is destined one day to become universal. From Montaigne on, all philosophers *could* be aware and many *were* indeed aware that powers-that-be tend to represent the rules and norms which they happen to prefer as dictated by nature or reason, and so universal in their essence and offering the best choice there is for every human being; and that therefore the rules promoted as universal may under closer scrutiny prove to be symptoms of parochialism in disguise. But to be aware of the danger is not the same as to escape it; as a matter of fact, most efforts were

directed at stifling the suspicion, arguing it away, declaring it null and void. The more habitualised are the ways and means of one's own land the more they feel to 'stand to reason', to be the 'natural way' of doing things, particularly if seen against strange and alien ways and means, which feel odd or mistaken. But, as Cornelius Castoriadis put it succinctly and pithily in his 'Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary':

... when one moves, as the last Husserl and the first Heidegger, from the egological, strictly phenomenological point of view ... to the 'life-world', one has just exchanged the egocentric for an ethno- or sociocentric point of view: solipsism on a larger scale. For, to know, as we must, that our *Lebenswelt* is but one among the indefinite number of others is to recognise that there is a multiplicity of 'first person' 'collective experiences' among which there is, at first glance, no privileged one; at second glance, the only 'privileged' one philosophically and, I would add, politically – is the one which made itself capable of *recognizing* and *accepting* this very multiplicity of human worlds, thereby breaking as far as possible the closure of its own world [Castoriadis, 1997: 325].

Few philosophers, if any, did in actual fact avoid the trap set by the insidious tendency of socially instituted habits to disguise or reincarnate as reason – even if they explicitly and earnestly warned against the assumption that reason resides only in one's own country and kept repeating that what is different from one's own idea of truth is not necessarily wrong just for being different. As Tzvetan Todorov showed in his study of nationalism, racism and exoticism in French thought, most of the models for universal morality launched by the philosophers of moral universalism were but home truths raised to the status of universality; many of the models were straightforward tautologies (as, for instance, Pascal's argument about universality deserved by Christianity: since no other religion taught us that men were born in sin, no other religion but Christianity spoke the truth) [Todorov, 1989]. Despaired of the pervasive and pernicious threat of parochialism, Husserl spent his life developing a method to purify the truth-searching reason from all contamination with history, culture, emotion – in short, with 'mere existence'. To confer on reason unconditional superiority over history, culture, emotion and proclaim its independence from all those lesser beings was a bold, yet nevertheless arbitrary choice – and a very modern, very European one, to be sure.

Given the breath-taking inventiveness of the human mind, it is remarkable that only one method of putting such doubts to rest by representing the choice as not a choice but necessity has been found and practised in the modern era. Johannes Fabian [1983] gave that method the name of *chronopolitics*. It

consisted in casting the lateral, contemporaneous diversity upon the timescale, and so representing the different as obsolete, a relic of the past that outlived its time and now exists on a borrowed one, carrying a no-appeal death verdict carved all over its body. To do so took but few relatively simple mental operations.

First, the idea of universalisation as a gradual process of making the different alike was projected on the flow of historical time; what was born in the modern world as an intention pressed against the future was stretched back to the beginnings of mankind. Once that has been accomplished, the rest was easy: hidden behind the twin shields of historical progress and imperialist project, the contents of the 'universal model' were secure from questioning, secure even from the need to justify themselves argumentatively. It was *obvious* that speeding up the wheels of progress, lifting the backward and spreading the good news of the proper form of human existence was the 'white man's burden'. The contents of the 'universal model' were nothing else than the values and norms that happened to be values and norms of the carriers of that burden.

The stratagem of chronopolitics depended from the start on the support of two closely related authorities: that of the idea of history as a process of gradual, but relentless *universalisation*, and the practice of extending the Western, modern rule with the view of making it sooner or later truly universal. The persuasive power of chronopolitical assertions could last as long as the authority of those two authorities remained unquestionable. This, though, is no more the case.

The strength of the twin authorities has been eroded simultaneously from the top and from the bottom. The grip in which the West held the rest of the world and which was expected to tighten as 'the time marches on' is softening, and rapidly. Still half a century ago any part of the globe not under the administration of one or another European country or its overseas settlements was seen as 'no man's land', sooner or later to be assigned to the Western jurisdiction. Today even the tiniest spot of the globe can successfully claim sovereignty and more often than not is gladly granted it – sometimes even despite its residents' wishes. Its sovereignty may be a sham as far as military and economic self-sufficiency go, but it most certainly covers the right to decide locally which of the values and norms on global offer are right and proper for the local residents.

The idea of objective superiority of certain values and norms which used to justify the claims to universality made on their behalf does not arouse much excitement among the powers-that-be in the West, whose hopes for global rule are now grounded in financial and trade ascendancy which may only gain from political and cultural dispersion and diversity. Neither does it impress the former dependencies of the West. Such Western inventions as tanks, mines and

machine-guns, private cars, burglar alarms and fast-food joints, occasionally also anti-epidemic vaccines, may be readily embraced while refraining from treating Western Civilization as a package deal; to get the cars and the tanks, one does not need to engage in the philosophical debate about universality of Western values, abandon the native styles, nor abstain from digging up from oblivion, or inventing, one's own cultural tradition.

To cut a long story short: the times of 'assimilation', when 'lower' cultures were prompted and sooner or later eager to efface their difference in the name of the values and styles of the 'higher culture', are by and large over. From whatever side you look at it, *difference is today an asset* rather than a liability and those different from the dominant majority may reasonably expect to gain rather than lose from guarding and displaying their idiosyncrasies.

No wonder that nowadays one does not hear much of 'universalisation'. Instead, one hears quite a lot of 'globalisation' – a concept quite unheard of at the time when 'universalisation' loomed large in daily discourse. This conceptual change of guard is symptomatic – one can say that the change of the message is itself a message. If 'universalisation' stood for courage and determination, 'globalisation' stands for resignation and lack of resolve. Universalisation was what one does or intends to do; globalisation stands for what is happening to us in an internet-like messy world into which all seem to be putting their fingers but of which no one is, or can truly be, in charge. Universalisation was to be the work of the all-powerful law of history aided and abetted by the unified code of reason; globalisation emerges from the contingent interplay of uncoordinated and mostly anonymous forces. Finally, universalisation was to result in the 'sameness' of human beings; globalisation, on the contrary generates new cultural diversification as it smothers and levels up or down the extant differences in economy and material trappings of daily life.

The point, however, which seems to me more crucial than any other, is that the idea of universalisation needed to be and has been elbowed out by that of globalisation because there are simply no forces left self-confident and resourceful enough to undertake what the *project* of universalisation entailed. Such forces which truly dominate the world today thrive on exploiting the differences, not the similarities – and show no interest nor display any zeal in promoting actively the unification of mankind and all its works. But – let me repeat – the discourse of universality tends to remain inconsequential unless supported by the determined universalising effort. Without universalising powers, universality is no more than a construct of the philosophical debate which, as Wittgenstein sadly observed, 'leaves everything as it is'. Universality may be the universalism's gospel, but universalising action is its sword. And so I put it to you that if universalism has fallen presently on a bad patch, it is not because of the drawbacks of the universality discourse, lack of ingenuity in putting together a convincing argument, or other failings of ethical

philosophers – but because of the waning of that universalist, proselytising and converting spirit alive throughout the modern era, together with the modern social arrangements and modern global balances of power which fed it and gave it the air of a realistic objective.

Where does all this leave the question of moral discourse? If two centuries of flirting with ‘moral absolutism’ fell flat without an issue, is a ‘serious moral discourse’ still possible? To an orthodox ethical philosopher the answer is an emphatic ‘no’, and that ‘no’ is a good reason to be worried.

This worry is not the result of an empirical observation that nowadays, when ‘moral absolutism’ falls into disrepute or reveals its impotence, more people than before and on more occasions confuse good with evil and more evil deeds are committed. Whether this is indeed the case, is after all highly debatable. The nostalgically-recalled by ethical philosophers ‘high modernity’ times, when the search for the one and only universal and ultimate rational ethical code went on unabated, were not known after all for their heightened sense of morality and a panic retreat of evil. Most atrocious crimes in the history of humanity have been committed in the name and for the sake of the absolute truth and ultimate good. Concern with the ultimate, irrevocable verdict of Nature and Reason did not stop crimes from being perpetrated; if anything, it helped to commit them and justify them once committed, because the ‘finality’ of all final truth, ‘universality’ of all universal justice means precisely the *permission to disregard all truths but one* and to consider proper all injustices that are believed to bring the universal justice closer. As the age-old folk wisdom has it, the perfect is the enemy of the good – while whoever looks for absolute perfection makes many enemies.

Besides, shifting the problem of moral choice to that of obedience to the rule, and so to conformity to the will of the stronger rather than to responsibility for the fate of the weaker – that trade-mark of the universalist strategy in its orthodox edition – leaves the objects of ethical regulation incapable and unwilling to make moral judgments of their own and shoulder responsibility for their consequences. This may not be a big problem in the running of daily business and in everyday routine, but it tends to swell to catastrophic proportions once the trained conformity is deployed by evil powers for evil purposes.

Consider the following parable. Mother is taking her child for a walk. A stray dog runs by and the child wants to stroke it. Mother tells the child not to do so, and the child, expectedly, asks why. There are three ways in which mother can answer that question. She may say: ‘Because I say so’. Or: ‘stray dogs are dirty, you may get ill’. Or: ‘You may frighten the dog; dogs have reasons to be afraid of children, because some children are cruel and like to inflict pain’.

From the point of view of instrumental reason, all three answers are of

equal value, providing they achieve their purpose, which is to stop the child from stroking the dog. From the moral point of view, they are however miles apart. The difference comes from the fact that while the *instrumental value* of response is measured solely by obedience to whatever it demands, the *moral value* of the answer may only be measured by the increase or decrease of moral capacity in the person to whom it is addressed. And the moral capacity consists in the capacity and the will *to take the point of view of the other and the good of the other as seen in that view for one's prime concern* even if no rule commands one to do so in a given case; and *to take responsibility for one's responsibility* for the other's good – also for one's responsibility for the other's right to define that good.

When judged by moral standards, the first two answers are at best amoral, but they may be immoral in their consequences. The first answer is at least sincere and unashamedly calls for obedience; more exactly, for taking the will of someone stronger, of someone able to reward and punish (in this case the mother), for the principle of one's own behaviour. Do what you are told, as long as the person who is telling you to do so has the power to coerce you into submission.

The second answer makes allowances for the child's thinking ability, appeals to the child's reason by suggesting that the command should be followed because it is good for the child; an expedient regularly used, as Michel Foucault pointed out, by all 'pastoral' powers, which present their rule as service to the ruled – deemed to be incapable to understand, unless told, what is good for them and so unable to attend to their own well-being on their own, but able to see what is in their best interest when properly directed to it. The second answer also defines obliquely the meaning of that 'good' which ought to justify obedience to the rule: that 'good' is the actor's own benefit, the actor's pleasure or avoidance of pain. What you do to others is good or bad depending on the effects it will have on your own condition. The principle is the same as in the first answer: follow the rule because if you don't you will be punished. The sole difference consists in the charging of the stray dogs, rather than the command-giver herself, with the capacity to inflict pain. Mother should be thanked for the warning; stray dogs must be avoided or chased away.

Only the third answer appeals to the care for the other. It does not promise rewards nor threaten punishment. It does not justify the need of care by the power of the other to get what the other wants. On the contrary, it points out that it is the other who will suffer from the actor's disobedience, not the actor himself. The actor is strong, he may take action or desist from taking it without penalty in any case. It is the other who is weak and helpless to stop the harm which the action may bring.

The third answer, therefore, appeals not to the actor's responsibility *to* (this or that power), but to his responsibility *for* (someone powerless). The dog is

powerless precisely because it does not give commands, does not spell out what the child should do, and anyway has no means to force the child to do what it, the dog, wants. That 'taking responsibility' which the third answer implies does not mean that the child should be (as it would when following the other two answers), an executor of somebody else's will, only this time of a different kind of 'somebody'. After all, the child may only suspect and does not know for sure what the dog indeed wants; it is this uncertainty which demands that the child visualises the dog's wishes, and there is no knowing for sure that the visualisation will be correct.

To conclude, the *peculiarity* of the third answer lies in its appeal to the actor's *freedom*. It points out that the actor is free to choose, that the choice is his and his alone – and that this is precisely why whatever choice the actor makes in the end he will have but himself to blame for. The third answer does not offer anything that in the logic of instrumental reason would pass as a rational argument against the pleasure of stroking the dog. There is no hint of a power able to coerce child to be guided by the dog's welfare. There is no hint either that to care for that welfare, to avoid inflicting pain, 'stands to reason', promotes the child's interests or makes good business sense. It says: 'you do not know and you won't know what to do; all the greater, therefore, is your responsibility for what you are doing – so think carefully about the effect your action may have on others'.

I have dwelt on that 'dog stroking' parable rather longer than the brief and rather trivial event of meeting a dog in the street would demand, but there was good reason to do so. The story offers an insight into the reasons why morally concerned persons should not necessarily bewail the failure of the 'universalist' strategy and why they ought not necessarily be appalled by the growing evidence that plurality and polyvocality, rather than being temporary irritants, tend to remain permanent features of the human condition.

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau already pointed out more than two centuries ago, solely the choice made by a free person refers the action to the actor's responsibility and therefore allows it to be judged as good or bad. The choice (a not-pre-determined choice and one that is made in the situation of unclarity) is the birth-place of a moral person and the homeground of morality. Not only that much feared uncertainty does not preclude 'serious morality', but on the contrary, it is precisely the situation of not-knowing-for-sure-what-to-do that makes moral responsibility serious; it prods, wakes up, calls out the moral self in the acting person and lowers the chance that moral considerations will be dismissed as irrelevant to his or her action. The question of the action being 'good' or 'bad' is confronted in all its seriousness when that action is *not* a 'command-following' step, when it is not clear which authority is entitled to command – and so the actors cannot assign responsibility to anyone but themselves.

And so we have come to the second of the two strategies mentioned at the beginning. You may take the preceding considerations as a defence plea on behalf of the 'stronger version' of that second strategy which, as you remember, starts from the assumption that 'plurality is good for morality' and proceeds 'to make the best of the chance it creates'. Plurality is the condition *sine qua non* of human freedom. And there is no morality without freedom. Humans come across the problem of setting apart good from evil because they have to choose between more than one possibility to act, and they come to grips with that problem in the practice of choice.

The partisans of the universalist strategy suspect deep in their hearts – often despite their outspoken beliefs and the opinions they would be ready openly to endorse – that good people who know well how to proceed have no use for freedom; that freedom is clamoured by those bent on making wrong choices, and that once obtained freedom is likely to be used solely for evil. Yet it is unbecoming of the pursuers of the other, the pluralist, strategy to believe the contrary – that freedom is a sufficient guarantee that goodwill be chosen over evil, that (as Richard Rorty says) once we take care of freedom, goodness and beauty will take care of themselves. And it would be downright wrongheaded for them to assume that once freedom has been achieved there is nothing left to be done, and that what is chosen does not really matter providing that whatever is chosen has been chosen freely. *What is chosen does matter a lot*; it is the only thing that does matter in the end. Freedom is there to prod moral responsibility and thus to help make good choices. A free human being is one who has no excuse for not making them.

Good choice starts from the willingness to care for the Other, which is the expression of respect for the Other's *dignity*. But the care for the Other risks being wrong-footed unless it is linked from the start with tolerance – which is the sign of respect for the Other's *freedom*.

One universalist precept irremovably present in the pluralist strategy is the postulate of universality of human rights, understood as the right to be and remain different. But this kind of universalism does not boil down to the resigned acceptance that humans will probably stay different and that nothing can nor should be done to make them more alike; if this was the case, the recognition of human rights would amount to sheer indifference, to washing one's hand of all responsibility for the fate of others. The universal right to difference has no moral value unless it is a product of freedom; that is, unless humans are truly free in both the negative and the positive sense of freedom, and so they have the resources enabling them to choose what they genuinely wish to choose and to sustain their choices.

Choosing the form of humanity for others is an exercise in power, not morality. But declaring neutrality regarding that form, whether it was willingly chosen or surrendered to for the lack of choice, is a symptom of callousness,

not the moral stance. It is *caring that the others have what is necessary to make their choices freely which lies at the very heart of morality*.

Plurality is the starting point and the end point of moral engagement with the Other. Thanks to plurality, partners may confront each other as moral subjects and so enter a dialogue in which their common presence in the world they share can be negotiated without putting the rights of any one of them in jeopardy. But contrary to Jürgen Habermas, the purpose, the horizon of that negotiation is not a consensus which would put an end to that plurality which prompted the moral engagement in the first place, but making the plurality of human ways more secure and so preserving and reproducing the conditions of the dialogue, the conditions of morality.

Yet (and this is why Habermas's protestations against 'distorted communication' must be carefully heeded) moral engagement would be barren, were it confined to dialogue without making sure that the participants of the dialogue are indeed free to choose the form of life which sets them apart from the others. In the present world we are far from having made sure that freedom is the property of all; and the deepening polarisation of access to the means needed to exercise freedom of choice and of the rights to mobility shows that we are not coming closer to that situation. In the world which has no other resource to rely on in its struggle to improve on its own morality except the moral responsibility of free agents, the active promotion of the universality of free self-assertion is the crucial and the most urgent of moral precepts.

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