Rational Discussion: Comparative 
Historical Notes on Its Origins, 
Enemies, and Prospects

I

By rational discussion I mean a discussion, debate, or peaceable argument among two or more individuals facing an important and difficult issue. They try to persuade one another primarily by means of logic and evidence. Though the issue may be an emotional one—a matter to be discussed more fully in a moment—in a discussion that deserves to be called rational, the participants keep emotional and personal appeals to a minimum. They refrain from personal abuse. The assumption is that those with different opinions deserve respect and serious intellectual consideration. Lurking in the background here is a rough notion of human equality, or perhaps more accurately the social equality of all people capable of rational thought and behavior. Those deemed incapable are excluded.

This conception of rational discussion is an ideal type in Max Weber’s terminology, an abstraction formed in the hope of clarifying a messy and impure reality. It is also an idealization—some might say a romantic idealization—of certain ways of coping with disagreement that probably have never existed in quite so edifying a form. Nor is there much reason to expect purely dispassionate and rational discussion to be a common feature of human history. Political change hardly ever takes place without arousing intense passions. Nevertheless victory does not necessarily go to those with the most indignation or moral outrage. Without a cool and detached assessment of the existing situation, the opportunities it presents as well as those it closes off, no political movement can be victorious. It cannot even survive for long. Here is where rational discussion comes in. When rational discussion works, it brings all the feasible
choices to the surface so that the participants in the discussion can choose among them.

If rational analysis and rational discussion remain indispensable even in a highly charged political situation, they probably work better in less highly charged contexts. These include discussions about the application of well-known scientific principles in the natural or “hard” sciences. If the application of the natural sciences is relatively uncontroversial, the foundations and basic concepts are still matters of sharp dispute. The notion that history and the social sciences are controversial while mathematics and the hard sciences are free from debate and quarrels is a pure myth. The foundations of mathematics have been a matter of sharp and at times acrid dispute since the latter part of the seventeenth century.\(^1\) In the case of physics it seems to this outsider that the foundations are just as wobbly, but the discussions are much better tempered.

Often, academic discussions are acrimonious and boring in a way that leads to a consensus of exhaustion rather than real agreement. Yet decisions have to be made and judgments passed. For that reason, at least in economically advanced countries, one rarely hears the proposal that attempts at rational discussion be abandoned. Judgment by \textit{diktat} in the name of a dubious doctrine or ephemeral popular mood is the only alternative to attempts at rational discussion. Right now hardly anyone wants that.

\section*{II}

While the ideal may never have been realized, there have been approaches to it, as well as outright and vehement rejections. These very different postures toward the theory and practice of rational discussion have had great and grave consequences for human happiness and human misery.

Some of the early sprouts of what much later became the working institutions of rational discussion appear in ancient Athens. Pericles’ \textit{Funeral Oration} celebrates Athenian freedom of thought, taste, and speech as well as the city’s military power. On the other hand Pericles saw to it that the issue of his strategy in the war against Sparta did not come before

\(^1\)On mathematics see Morris Kline, \textit{Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty} (New York, 1980); on physics there is enlightening first-hand information in Albert Einstein and Max Born, \textit{Briefwechsel 1916–1955} (Munich, 1969).
the assembly. Evidently as Pericles saw the situation, the Athenian assembly was no place to expect a sensible discussion of his essentially defensive policy. That policy was hard on the peasants because it led to annual Spartan invasions and the destruction of crops. Perhaps wisely Pericles preferred to impose silence instead of allowing public discussion of a very touchy issue. To judge from later debates in the assembly it seems unlikely that a public debate on the policy of Pericles could have been rational.

Nor is it easy to guess what Pericles himself might have meant by rational discussion. In his day as well as afterward the notions of rational discussion and rational policy were latent rather than explicit and lacked any clear referent. Especially after the death of Pericles the situation was one in which every political leader could claim that his policy was the rational one because it would bring glory and other advantages to the city. In Thucydides’ thinking, on the other hand, one can see a clear distinction emerging. The distinction is between demagogic political appeals and nondemagogic ones. Demagogic appeals were those that sought popular support with minimal attention to their risks and probable costs. Almost certainly, a good many Athenian citizens besides Thucydides were aware of demagogic policy and were uneasy about its consequences. Indeed it is hardly an exaggeration to assert that Plato and Aristotle in their different ways were trying to find out how to establish a polis without demagogic policy and one in which their version of rational discussion could flourish.

In the next century Demosthenes was the leading political figure. Unlike Pericles, who died long before the Spartan victory, Demosthenes had the misfortune to live long enough to witness the disastrous failure of his efforts to rouse the Athenians against the dangers of Macedon. In Demosthenes’ speeches there is considerable reliance on facts and logic. There was at least the hope—not just a pretense—that the facts and logic of the situation as he presented them would be compelling and rouse the Athenians to action before it was too late.

But Demosthenes’ conclusions came prior to his logic. Anyone who did not share his political conclusions was, for Demosthenes, not worth talking to, or worse, probably a traitor who had sold his tongue for Macedonian bribes. It is of course impossible to argue with anyone who sees a conspiracy behind every disagreement. At that time, just before the final end of Athenian independence, the political situation as a whole was highly unfavorable to the development of a system of rational discourse. With the presuppositions that Demosthenes expressed about his opponents, presuppositions and accusations that may have been quite true,
rational discourse was simply out of the question. The situation was too tense, the alternatives too stark.

Whether Athenian legal practice, so far as we can know it from surviving records, came closer to rational discussion is really a question for specialists. Since it is well known that public speakers could get training in how to make any argument look plausible—an idea that runs exactly counter to modern concepts of rational discussion, where one strips away all forms of self-deception for the sake of truth, honesty, and a valid conclusion—it seems somewhat unlikely that the legal contribution could have been very great. Nevertheless the Athenians did develop—if they did not create—an adversary system of legal practice. A peaceful and socially controlled adversary relationship is a significant component in the development of rational discussion. Plato made this relationship central to his dialogues. Even the theater may have helped ordinary citizens understand the notion of getting to the heart of a matter by listening to the viewpoints of opposing sides. Under the fateful name of dialectic this mode of thinking was to enjoy a long career in philosophy.

The theory and practice of discussion as a way of problem solving and avoiding or resolving conflicts took still other forms among these inventive and loquacious people. Somewhere Max Weber pointed out that the Greeks wanted to find a form of argument that could really put the bite on an opponent and compel assent. Logic and mathematics, first rationalized and systematized by the Greeks, do exactly that. With the acceptance of simple "undeniable" (we know better now) premises one could lead an intellectual opponent to inescapable conclusions. To the modern romantic this mathematical and logical thinking sounds horribly authoritarian. In classical Greece that was not true. Mathematics and logic provided tools that for the first time made it possible to compel assent from anybody: emperor, king, priest or general. High social status had nothing to do with truth or argument. Thus the mathematical-rational point of view and democracy were bound together and mutually supportive.

Still, there was something missing in all these moves toward rational discussion. It was the absence of any control over partisanship in the interest of truth. This gap was apparent in the workings of the legal system. The jurors of Athens, composed of citizens who could afford the time and who welcomed the small fee for jury duty, were notorious for seeking their own entertainment rather than rendering justice.

Looking back over the Athenian record in solving human problems by rational discussion, we can see that the most important aspect of this
record was the fact that it was a distinct historical novelty. In the course of bloody internal conflicts the Athenians managed to create the world’s first democracy in a civilized state. If they were going to have a democracy at all, the citizens would have to learn to try persuasion and to give up force, at least in politics among equals. Unlike the military theocracies that preceded her, there was in Athens no supreme authority with an army, a bureaucracy, or a priesthood to make decisions and issue orders for the people to execute. Athenians would have to decide on the orders for themselves. Some of the persuasion would have to be rational and a great deal more would have to seem rational. In comparison with its historical predecessors Athenian efforts look like both a qualitative leap forward and a return to the ways of debate in the tribal councils of some nonliterate and simpler societies.

Imperial China had some of the cultural prerequisites for rational discussion, though the distribution of power and authority in China was almost the opposite of that in the democratic phase of ancient Athens. In political and religious issues, literate Chinese followed for the most part the maxim jamais trop de zèle before Talleyrand tried to make this a diplomatic principle. To be sure there were occasional attacks on the Buddhists, and especially their monasteries, when these began to look like a state within a state. But there was little theological fervor behind these attacks. China lacked enthusiasm in the older religious sense of the word. Confucianism eschewed the supernatural and was not really a religion despite its support of ancestor worship. It was mainly a system of etiquette. Its main competitor, Taoism, had a strong streak of anti-political quietism. Chinese culture, though capable of xenophobia like practically all human cultures, was not one to generate heresy hunting. In that sense it favored rational discussion.

The Confucian tradition also carried, especially in the works of Mencius, the general notion of an obligation to criticize and correct unjust authority or manifestly destructive policies pursued by such an authority. This concept of the right and obligation to criticize is of course fundamental to rational discussion, even if by itself insufficient to ensure it. It is insufficient because it says nothing about the tone and etiquette of discussion. As we have seen, however, that Confucian ideal of a gentleman strongly opposed any form of vehement partisanship. On that score Chinese culture appears more favorable to rational discussion than Athenian.

Unlike the culture of public oratory in democratic Athens authoritarian China operated through a memorandum culture. Offhand one might think that this situation would have encouraged the development of ra-
tional debate in China because a memorandum culture provides hardly any opportunities for demagogues. Yet a memorandum culture limits the opportunities for dialogue. The only person who may be persuaded by a memorandum is the person designated to read it. Here was the main obstacle. The only worthwhile recipient for an official document in China was the emperor himself or, second best, an official (sometimes a eunuch) whom the emperor trusted and believed.

At this point the imperial system failed badly. Critical reporting and advice were fairly effective under good emperors, that is when they were hardly necessary. Under bad emperors, interested in their own expensive pleasures rather than the welfare of the people, critical reporting and advice were worse than useless. The emperor disregarded the advice and punished its authors for seditious disrespect. Outside the mandarinate there were no effective interest groups that could push an emperor in the direction of behaving himself or adopting good policies against his inclinations. In turn the mandarinate itself was fragmented into factions and ultimately impotent. To put the point more broadly, the authoritarian structure of the Chinese empire greatly inhibited any exchange of differing opinions, whether or not the discussion was based on logic and evidence.

III

With our soundings into two very different cultures, ancient Athens and imperial China, let us see if they might reveal or suggest social situations favorable and unfavorable to the habit of rational discussion that could apply to other times and places.

To perceive the magnitude of the Athenian achievement, one has to see it against the background of the great theocratic monarchies of the Near East that preceded it. Athenian society was very different indeed. Just how and why the differences arose is hard to determine because there is little evidence. Some historians have thrown up their hands in wonder and called the whole process the Greek miracle.

If the beginnings are obscure, the rest of the process is sufficiently clear for our purpose. Athenian achievements in the direction of free discussion were part of a general trend toward popular male autonomy that culminated in democracy. In Athens there is hardly any sign that public policy was ever set by an all-powerful divine monarch. Even though the notion of impiety remained strong, one can hardly speak of religion as setting the framework for politics in historical times. Instead the trend was to-
ward men getting together in small or large gatherings to argue out with each other what they ought to do. That of course is the essence of rational discussion. It is unlikely that the Athenians or any other Greeks invented this version of rational discussion because it occurs widely in nonliterate societies. Nevertheless this was the first attempt to make it work in a “civilized” society, that is, one with a written language.

The politics of the ancient theocratic monarchies and of classical civilization itself were violent. This violence, and the high-level of political tension behind it, imposed a severe strain on rational discussion. In classical Greece two issues dominated the politics of the day: one domestic and the other foreign. The two were related and sometimes coalesced. The domestic issue was whether the “many,” or the “poor,” or, as we might say, “the masses” would take away the property of the well-to-do and physically destroy them. Likewise there were the issues of whether one city-state would take over another one and how the wealthy and the poor in each of the contesting states would line up in relation to each other. With this continually high level of conflict it is hardly surprising that the controls over political partisanship were weak and debates often venomous.

From this review two propositions emerge: (1) Popular sovereignty, or at least movement in that direction, is essential to rational discussion. Without popular sovereignty, rational discussion becomes meaningless. We will reserve for later the question of whether rational discussion is necessarily an elitist practice within a system of popular sovereignty. (2) A high level of political tension, especially conflicts that threaten the existence of important segments in the societies of a given political system, creates great difficulties for rational discussion. There is probably a point at which such discussion becomes impossible or is stopped by sheer physical force. Again the time and situation of this crisis may vary considerably in accord with a society’s historically determined political culture.

Chinese society presents an instructive contrast that supports the generalizations suggested by ancient Athens. In China there were some important factors, mainly intellectual traditions, favoring the development of rational discussion. These had appeared in predynastic times. As pointed out above, Mencius had stressed the obligations of the ruler to his people and the right and obligation to criticize an unjust ruler. In sharp contrast to Athens the “gentlemanly” ethos of Confucianism was very much opposed to vehement partisanship.

But rational discussion could play no more than a limited role under the single authority of an emperor, who could, at least in the short run,
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reject any advice presented to him. Beyond limited and shifting personal factions among the higher officials, there was no effective organized pressure group behind alternative policies. As a memorandum culture instead of an oral and rhetorical one like Athens, there were limited opportunities for rational discussion. The only audience that mattered was the emperor himself. “Good” emperors were overloaded with reports, while “bad” ones paid no attention.

With the advantages of hindsight we may also see that certain ingredients for a working system of rational discussion were absent in both classical Athens and early China. Oratory is not really discussion. There is no give and take during a powerful speech. Formal debate before a large audience is only a little better. Both are really attempts to sway the masses. A memorandum partakes even less of the character of a discussion. It is a private statement whose effect is often unknown to the author. Contrary views are also likely to be unknown. In other words there was as yet in these two different early societies no really suitable social framework for rational discussion. That is true even though the potential was present in the Athenian law courts and in Chinese imperial guarantees of freedom of criticism by scholar-officials, guarantees which were often violated. Free discussion is a delicate plant. It needs an institutional setting where it can grow protected against the arbitrary commands and demands of a ruler as well as against the gusts of passion from an outraged crowd. In this sense of requiring a buffer against the outside world, free discussion is an elite institution. The need for special training in logical exposition and the restraint of partisanship reinforces this elite character. No wonder the man in the street or behind the plow, as well as his hard-pressed spouse, have been suspicious of and hostile toward this form of rationality.

IV

At this point we may continue our historical soundings by turning to later western history for information about forces favoring and opposing the practice of rational discussion. The most obvious opposition came from organized Christianity, or more precisely the Catholic Church. This is not the place to recite the Church’s often bloody attempts to suppress heresy. It is obvious enough that a mentality that seeks out heresy and tries to destroy heretics is, to say the least, unfavorable to rational discussion. Heresy hunting was a scourge and a form of cruelty unknown
to classical civilization, though the seeds of such behavior are plain enough in the treatment of the inhabitants of Canaan by the ancient Hebrews. It is nearly impossible to have a real discussion when some participants hold that other participants’ beliefs are dangerously evil. In medieval Western Europe the first impulse toward toleration may have come from commercial contacts in the cosmopolitan port cities, especially those of the Low Countries. After all, the important things about a merchant were the goods he brought to sell, their quality, and the prices he wanted. Fellow traders were not really interested in the religion he professed. In this situation religion was, so to speak, bracketed and its salience greatly reduced. This appears to be the fundamental social and psychological mechanism behind the rise of toleration. However the impulse from the medieval port cities was not strong enough to carry the process very far. The bloodiest struggles were yet to come in the wars of religion, from 1559 to 1648.

These wars began as straightforward religious conflicts, as the Catholic Church, with considerable success, tried to regain territories lost to Protestantism. Later other interests came to the fore, most noticeably those of the emerging national state. The downgrading of religion was more important in this context and contributed more to de facto toleration than events in the port cities. After the fighting had gone on for decades it seemed to many thoughtful men to have reached a stand off. More fighting could only mean more killing—and for what? Furthermore acute rulers and their advisers began to see that they could gain more through strengthening their own state by stiffening and extending royal bureaucracies, by improving their armies, and thereby earning a better place in the system of alliances, than they could by pouring out blood and treasure in pursuit of the triumph of “true” religion. Thus the significance of religion lost ground to the interests of the national state. This weakening of the demand for religious conformity favored the prospects for rational discussion.

There was a time, say, shortly before the First World War, when one could end the story there on a note of decisive victory over the forces of obscurantism. That is no longer possible. Two closely related considerations destroy this rationalistic optimism. In the first place we have to notice that the downgrading of the religious obstacle to free discussion takes place only through the substitution of another overriding value. In the twentieth
century, and even before, both became idols beyond criticism. They have also been a source of bloodshed, intensified by modern technology, that greatly exceeds the slaughter of the wars of religion.

From the standpoint of finding and encouraging the social and psychological prerequisites of rational discussion under contemporary conditions, we can see more clearly how severe the obstacles are. As just suggested, the issues of the day cannot carry so high an emotional charge that compromise and dispassionate rational discussion become impossible. Yet reducing the emotional charge can be difficult because local grassroots leaders spend a great deal of energy trying to raise the emotional salience of the issues in order to retain or increase their following. This process is especially visible in the history of ethnic minorities, labor movements, and religious minorities.

In the case of movements of political and religious mobilization, such as communism, fascism, and certain forms of Christianity, we can observe a reduction of the emotional charge inherent in the official doctrines after the movement has held power for at least a dozen years. By this time the movement may have already done enormous damage, far more than just the destruction of institutions connected with rational discussion. In an aging religious and political movement the most noticeable features are disappointment at the movement’s failure to achieve frequently promised goals, and boredom with a propaganda that continues to urge discipline on behalf of these goals. This propaganda ceases to make sense in terms of the ordinary citizen’s daily experience. That may be the case for quite some years without producing an obvious loss of faith. But if signs appear that a segment of the top leadership has also lost faith, and for that reason punishment for failure to go through the rituals of allegiance is no longer swift, sure, and dependable, overt loss of faith can spread with astonishing speed. Parallel with this loss of faith there is a turn toward hedonism, at least among those who can afford it. If the future no longer seems attainable or worth struggling for, why not enjoy the present as best one can?

These transformations of the official faith are visible in the USSR and somewhat less obviously so in China. Similar cultural trends appeared in Christian Europe during the Renaissance prior to the Counter-Reformation. Disenchantment, boredom, and increasing hedonism quite clearly reduce the emotional charge of ideals and symbols that have moved men’s hearts.

On the other hand, can disenchantment, boredom, and hedonism provide adequate emotional nourishment for the growth of rational discus-
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sion? The answer seems doubtful. For rational discussion to take root, there has to be some sense of a social order worth working for, a sober awareness that this is not going to happen without serious dispute and some confidence in the role of rational discussion in settling these disputes. All this is tragically missing from the experience of both the USSR and China.

From the foregoing discussion one could gain the impression that any form of strongly held beliefs, religious or secular, about moral and immoral forms of human behavior would have consequences unfavorable for rational discussion. If some kinds of human behavior are deemed to be absolutely evil, there is no use discussing the matter, not even the causes of such behavior. True believers are not much interested in causes because the causes of evil seem so obvious. Believers want to extirpate an evil before the rot spreads. That is why we hear so much about “cleaning out” and “purification”—usually with strong punitive overtones—not only in Stalinist and Nazi propaganda, but also in portions of the Old Testament.

All this is true. But there is also good evidence to show that the link between intense transcendental belief and hostility to rational discussion is not universal and requires careful specification. In 1932 Rufus M. Jones published the influential study of mystic sectarianism and its contribution to democracy, Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth. The central idea of much of this mysticism, especially the later phase in the seventeenth century, was in Jones’s words “a glowing faith that there is something divine in man, which under right influences and responses can become the dominant feature of a person’s whole life” (p. 121). Clearly the English mystics were as passionately religious as human beings can become. It is also clear that a religion stressing a belief in the spark of divinity in all men (and women too in some cases, it seems), is not likely to develop into an oppressive system of religious conformity. There was too great a respect for the individual conscience for that to happen. Most of the mystics (but not all—the Familists were an exception[see p. 129]) developed democratic forms of organization for their religious communities. In these communities there was much discussion of moral and religious issues by ordinary rank and file members. Such discussion was both practice in and practice for democracy.

To sum up, religious passion need not always have obscurantist consequences. If this passion has a democratic or perhaps even populist turn, mainly a belief in the worth of the individual, it may under favorable circumstances, especially when granted some toleration by a higher au-
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authority, impart an impulse toward free and rational discussion. It is when this passion, in either a religious or secular form, stresses an exclusive possession of truth and morality, that there appears an ominous threat to freedom and rationality. Since new and passionate beliefs are most likely to appear in a period of social disorder and severe conflict, a democratic outcome seems rare and improbable.

There is one further reason for the frequency of a destructive outcome. In itself the ideal of rational discussion is not very exciting. It also carries elitist overtones of well-educated and well-to-do men sitting in a comfortably appointed and tastefully paneled board room discussing the miseries of ordinary people, miseries they have never experienced directly and never will. Hence in times of political or religious excitement the ideal of rational discussion can scarcely get a hearing. It is drowned out by the cries of “à la lanterne!” When the excitement dies down, people may or may not realize that they have been ruled from board rooms all along, even at the height of the excitement. To be sure, the people in the board rooms may have been somewhat different, and the physical appointments for a time less imposing, but whether the excitement led to more rational discussions in the revolutionary board rooms is another question. The answer appears to be negative. Rational discussion is often boring and requires a long period of boring politics with unexciting issues to get established.

V

By way of conclusion let us try to set down the major factors favorable and unfavorable to the development of rational discussion. It seems harder to point to favorable factors than unfavorable ones, a difficulty that may be significant. Nevertheless it will be well to begin with favorable or at least facilitating conditions.

One that seems to me crucial, though I do not recollect any discussion of it in the literature, is the development of generally accepted rules of logic and standards of evidence to guide and control disputes. On this score Western civilization owes a major debt to classical Greece.

The establishment of such standards is no easy task. Still such an intellectual achievement does not have to be anywhere near complete in order to be helpful. It is not necessary that everybody be a trained logician before taking part in a serious discussion about politics or anything else. Even a dim awareness that there are objective restraints on what one can
say and still make sense helps to check irresponsible assertions and accusations. If one thinks of Hitler as a counterexample, one has to remember that the Nazis never won a majority in a free election.

Standards of argument seem most secure in those intellectual fields most remote from the study of human passions and concerns, namely mathematics and the physical sciences. Yet even in these subjects we have noticed acrimonious debate over fundamentals. There appears to be rather less passionate investment in a particular intellectual position when the concern is concrete research. A natural scientist, and for that matter a social scientist, who tries to “find out something about something” can count on a fairly high degree of rational discussion of the methods used and findings proposed.

As we turn from general scientific and scholarly discussion to rational discussion of political issues, it is reasonably clear that an educated elite able to participate actively in political affairs is a minimum requirement for the existence of rational political debate. Whether the debate can remain rational if the participants extend much beyond the elite is an issue much discussed at present.

Two observations are pertinent. Confining political debate to an educated elite is no guarantee by itself that discussion will be rational. The elite’s education may be unsuitable and its general temper too arrogant for serious discussion of political matters. As for the rest of the population, the same considerations apply. They may or may not, depending on historical factors, have the knowledge and temperament suitable for any form of rational discussion, of which the political one is the most difficult.

The discussion so far has been about people who actually engage in rational discussion or at least try to. They have usually been a minority. A few words are necessary about the social atmosphere in which the rest of the population lives. Rather obviously it has to be an atmosphere of economic and political security. Concretely, that means there is no very serious threat to life and property from within the society or from foreign sources. Obviously this is a relatively rare situation in human history. And it is beginning to look as though rational discussion is likely to flourish most where it is least needed: where political passions are minimal. On that discouraging note we may end the discussion of favorable factors.

The factors unfavorable to the practice of rational discussion seem easier to identify than those just discussed. They include a high-level of political excitement, an authoritarian (and later totalitarian) regime that tolerates little or no opposition, a powerless educated elite, and—most dangerous of all—a religious or quasireligious belief in the way human society ought
to be organized, or will be organized. In the twentieth century such beliefs
have included a racially pure warrior society and a classless society.

This collection of factors, I suggest, boils down to the creation of ex­
treme partisanship or, more precisely, fright at the prospect of what could
happen to cherished hopes and beliefs under dispassionate critical exam­
ination. Beneath bluster and the endless reassertion of doctrinal orthodoxy
(which can change every twenty-four hours in totalitarian regimes) there
is, I think, a fear lest the justification for one’s existence could crumble
away if exposed to the light of rational inquiry.

It would be a serious mistake to leave the impression that the habit of
rational discussion will appear and grow where conditions are favorable
and the obstacles not very severe. The process is by no means so auto­
matic. Some concrete and strategically placed individuals have to get an
ideal before a new idea can take hold in any culture. There is no way to
guarantee that there will be such individuals or that the new ideal can be
transformed into new social habits.

Yet, when it does appear, rational discussion is one of the finest flowers
of human civilization. It is the embodiment of intelligence, restraint, ci­
vility, and cultivation.