



## Moral Communication in Modern Societies<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Introduction

The title for this lecture should read both more modestly and more accurately *Observations on Some Forms of Moral Communication in a Modern Society*. I hope that I shall be pardoned for having avoided such an awkward title but I feel obliged to alert the hearer, or the reader, to the fact that the actual title promises more than I can deliver.

One of the obvious ways for a social scientist to talk about morals in any society is to talk about the ways the members of that society moralize; it is only a slight exaggeration to say that in modern society the *only* way to talk about morals is to talk about moral communication. I shall try to explain why this is so, and if I succeed, much of the task I set myself for this lecture will be accomplished. The other part will consist of the description of some key features of modern morality.<sup>2</sup>

Although I shall not attempt a definition of the terms, it may not be entirely unnecessary if I indicate what I mean when I talk of *morality* and *morals* and what I understand by *communication* and *moral communication*.

First, I view morality as a reasonably coherent set of notions of what is right and what is wrong, notions of the good life that guide human action beyond the immediate gratification of desires and the momentary demands of a situation. Such notions, as all notions, are of course held by individuals, but they do not originate with the individual. They are intersubjectively constructed in communicative interaction, and they are selected, maintained and transmitted in complex social processes. Over the generations they come to form distinct historical traditions in which a particular view of the good life is articulated. This means that some conceptions of what is right and what is wrong are canonized and others censored. Thus a certain coherence between the notions is achieved. Once the path to reach that ideal is marked, the foundations for the moral order of a society are laid. Following that path is defined as life's ideal, and the ideal serves as a norm in the organization of collective life. When serious deviations from the norm are systematically punished, the society's moral order is fully established.

Second, when I speak of communication, I do not – as some would – refer to intraorganismic, intercellular processes. Nor do I have in mind inner speech.

Moreover, I consider it misleading to define various kinds of exchange processes 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, language. The processes are social (inter)actions of a special kind. They are essential to the organization of human collective life; they are especially important in making possible the effective transmission of the traditions of a society, including that of its moral order. Communicative processes are either reciprocal or unilateral; they are either direct, face-to-face, or mediated in a number of ways. They occur between individuals as individuals or as incumbents of office, and as representatives of groups or socially defined categories. Correspondingly, individuals address themselves to individuals or to offices, groups and socially defined categories of individuals. Furthermore, communication may be between anonymous senders and equally anonymous receivers.

As for *moral communication*: there is an obvious distinction between thematization of morals and moralizing. Thematization may be, but rarely is, free of moralizing, and moralizing need not, but sometimes does, employ thematization. Thematization ranges from descriptive statements about moral values here and there and narratives of explicitly moral examples of conduct to abstract formulations of ethical principles and criteria. Moralizing is either positive, as in praise, or negative, as in condemnation, and it may consist both of the evaluations of the behavior of others as well as of one’s own actions.

The addressees of moral communication may also be the objects of moralizing, as a child being scolded, or they may be the recipients of moralizing about others, as those listening to gossip. The methods of moralizing may be linguistic in the narrow sense of the term: semantic-lexical, prosodic or rhetorical. Besides these, or standing by themselves, paralinguistic, mimetic or gestural elements of expression may convey morally significant points. Furthermore, certain genres that may or may not have a primary moral function, *e.g.*, maxims and proverbs, may be used as formula-like components of moralizing communication.

Finally, moralizing varies in general style: it may be either direct, in the form of praise or complaint, accusation, indignation, *etc.*, or it may be indirect in the form of litotes, questions, if/then formulations, certain kinds of teasing, *etc.*

Before I begin developing my argument, I must point out its general limitations. I shall point out some specific ones later. I do not intend to take up certain issues that could, and should, be raised when morality is discussed. Among the most important of these is the question about the source of morality. Does it originate in a universal aspect of the human condition, and if so, is it possible to map that source with some degree of accuracy? Or is it merely a variable product of historical conditions and changing social constructions? And if that should be the case, does it imply that morality, too, is to be viewed in the perspective of radical historical relativism?

These are not new questions. They have been raised since the early days of philosophy. Various answers were given to them. To repeat, I shall not try to take up 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. Consequently I think that I should indicate briefly what they are.

I assume that there *is* a universal human source of morality. It is to be found in a constitutive feature of human intersubjectivity, the *reciprocity of perspectives*. Although the term was coined by Theodor Litt (1926: 221), it is well known that it became the cornerstone of Alfred Schutz's protosociological theory of intersubjectivity and of his description of the world of everyday life. Schutz did not write much about morality.<sup>3</sup> However, I do think that his analysis of the interactional consequences of the reciprocity of perspectives can be extended into an account of the origins of morality. I tried to show this in my contribution to the *Festschrift* for Maurice Natanson (Luckmann, 1995).

Intersubjectivity is an apparently simple fact of human life. As Husserl and Schutz kept pointing out, in the natural attitude of everyday life we take it for granted that we are not alone in the world. But, as they also showed, this simplicity rests on many general preconditions. The most obvious and the most important among them is human subjectivity. I do not think here of the trivial sense that there could be no intersubjective world without subjects. What I have in mind is the peculiar nature of human subjectivity with its specific structure of consciousness and temporality, and with its faculty to instill meaning into the most ordinary actions in everyday existence as well as into the big projects of life, and with its elementary emotional repertoire.<sup>4</sup>

All this is of course generally presupposed in the interactive constitution of morality as it is presupposed in the constitution of the life-world – but it is not enough. The element of human subjectivity that is specifically involved in the constitution of morality is the principle of the reciprocity of perspectives. Intersubjectivity cannot be imagined without the automatic operation of this principle in mundane consciousness. It is therefore indirectly responsible for the diverse intersubjective constructions of morality that form the foundation of the historical moral orders of human societies. It is the foundation upon which the edifice of an entire world is built: a world inhabited by others like us who hold us accountable for our actions and whom we hold responsible for theirs. Enough of that here.

My introductory remarks were intended, first, to define the basic terms of the argument and, second, to indicate its ontological and epistemological frame. I now turn to my topic, a discussion of the nature of morality in modern societies. I shall begin by anticipating the conclusions, that is to say, I will summarize the outcome of my argument and only then develop it step by step.

Knowing the end should make it easier to follow the steps which lead to it from the beginning. In a first step I shall summarize the well-known views on morality in classical sociological theory. I shall then point out certain problems inherent in these views and show how I think they can be resolved. Finally, I shall add a hypothesis of sorts about the dominant style of moral communication in modern societies. (See Luckmann, 1996b for an earlier version.)

## **II. The argument anticipated**

As the main sociological theories have it, morality largely disappeared from the social structure of modern societies. Its great dominant institutions, the economy and the state, are said to follow functional norms that are in fact, although not always also in their self-legitimatory rhetoric, emancipated from the traditional moral order. They no longer require justification by a transcendent universe. Once the view that morality was eliminated from modern social structure became part of the sociological consensus, it was a short step to another assumption. It was not only taken for granted that morals had no place in the rational-functional organization of the social structure, it was also assumed that it had vanished from society at large.

Granting that the main diagnosis may be essentially correct, the corresponding assumption is not at all self-evident. We only need to open our eyes and ears to the world around us to notice the continued presence of morality. It pervades the diverse social interactions in which we are involved day to day. It may not be the kind of morality which traditional moral authorities might have liked us to have, but it is a reasonably coherent view of the good life nonetheless. Instead of morality I should perhaps better say morality or moralities. The singular prejudges an empirical issue that can only be resolved by analyzing various forms of moral communication.

At the end I shall do some speculating and suggest that in modern society the dominant style of moral communication shows a preference for indirect moralizing. It is speculation because the evidence in support of this notion is not quite as systematic as the evidence for the continued presence of morality in the form of moralizing. But it is controlled speculation because there is some evidence for it. In combination with good theoretical grounds that speak for it, it has a fairly high degree of plausibility.

This, then, is what the steps of my argument are going to be. Now I should first like to place in historical perspective the reasons first for accepting the classical sociological assertion that morality has largely disappeared from the social structure of modern societies and second for refusing to accept the corresponding assumption that morality has in consequence entirely disappeared from society.

### III. The dissolution of the traditional moral order

With some simplification one may say that in archaic societies religion, morality and law (insofar as one may speak of law in the absence of written codices) had a common basis in social structure. At the very least, the institutions that involved different functions in social life were very closely coordinated – and that applied in particular to those institutions that served religious, moral and legal purposes. The conception of the good life which is at the heart of the moral order of every society was clearly articulated. That conception was specified in a wide range of behavioural *do's* and *don'ts*. Because life ran its course in small communities, breaches of the moral order were clearly visible, as were their punishments. The authority claimed for the moral order was 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. Orientation, including moral orientation in such a world, whether easy or not, was relatively simple.

It is obvious that in modern societies a moral order of this kind no longer exists. Nor are its features even distantly approximated. How did this come about?

In the course of Near Eastern and Western history, moral, religious and legal functions of collective life were increasingly collected in specialized and somewhat separate institutions that were systematically arranged to serve a particular set of closely related functions. The codification of rules of conduct and misconduct in the form of law, as for example in the Code of Hammurabi, is a case in point. Although not as exclusively attributed to a divine source as, e.g., the Ten Commandments, such codes were not (yet) fully detached from the sacred universe. Law remained holy to varying extents at least to the promulgation of the post-revolutionary Code Napoléon. During this entire period, religious institutions continued to be the official home of morals.

As the pace of functional differentiation of political, economic and legal functions of social life that marked Western societies since the late Middle Ages accelerated, neither religion nor the moral order was exempted from the general process. Yet, even after the emergence of the state and the economy as semi-autonomous domains, religious institutions remained the social-structural basis of the moral order for a long period. But as the churches, too, were subject to institutional specialization, that which was considered their proper domain was increasingly restricted. They were to lose their role in the polity and the economy; what remained was the family and the individual.

The social and moral discipline exerted by religious institutions decreased apace. The complex cultural and structural transformations to which we attach the simplifying labels Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution accelerated the process, temporarily sparing only the peripheries of modernization. Both religion and morals were increasingly individualized and, first in the case

of religion and subsequently (and even more contradictorily, regarding its essential function) in the case of morals, privatized. Both religion and morals turned inward. Having lost their social-structural home in the big public institutions, they for a while kept their lease on individual subjectivity. Religion was transformed into private faith, morality into subjective conscience.

Almost a century ago, Durkheim thought that if organic solidarity – as he termed the moral order necessary for societies with a complex division of labor – did not fill the vacuum left by the decline of the traditional moral order associated with simpler societies, modern society would become dangerously anomic. Keeping his conviction that a society without a moral order at its core could not survive, Durkheim searched for solutions in what today some would call civic culture, others intermediate institutions and still others social capital. Nearly fifty years later, Theodor Geiger, an important sociologist of law, started from a similar diagnosis. His conclusions, however, were quite different. He, too, took it for granted that in modern societies the traditional, fairly homogeneous and obligatory moral order was dissolving. But in his view this was a necessary condition for the evolution of modern society. A generally obligatory and behaviorally specific moral order appeared to him incompatible with a rationally organized, functionally differentiated modern society. According to him, some of those parts of traditional morality that had not been transformed into positive law, could only survive if they became socially irrelevant and, to use his term, spiritualized.

#### IV. The persistence of morality-in-use

Durkheim's and Geiger's view that modern societies no longer possess a generally obligatory moral order is shared by most contemporary social scientists. It can be hardly doubted that it must be accepted as essentially correct. However, Durkheim's and Geiger's conclusions about the consequences of this state of affairs are another matter entirely.

Durkheim was most likely wrong in postulating 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. On the contrary, it makes more sense to assume with Geiger that the rational organization of differentiated institutions in modern social structures not only could well do without such a moral order, but would only be impeded by it. Using Geiger's metaphor, one may say with him 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 and in which most *do's* and *don'ts* have become codified in a system of positive law is a kind of *Gesinnungsethik*, that is, an ethics of subjective disposition and motivation rather than a traditional ethics of responsibility and account-

ability. But Geiger is wrong on another important issue. Not only have some elements of traditional morality survived. This could perhaps be explained away as some sort of fossil. But Geiger's assertion that whatever morality remained evaporated into the rarefied air of a pure spirituality is clearly in error.

Another possibility regarding the fate of morals in the modern world is considerably more likely. Morality always had been a constitutive dimension of concrete face-to-face social interactions. It permeated what Goffman called the interaction order both in archaic societies in which it had no institutional basis of its own, as well as in traditional societies in which this was the case. Could it not be that, after the loss of the religious-moral institutional edifice which it occupied in traditional society, morality kept its permanent open-air home, as it were, the interaction order?

In other words: Historically, what I should like to call morality-in-use came first, and under certain social conditions more elaborate moral institutions emerged from it. In ancient civilizations morally significant notions and ideas were built into complex systems of morality. These had their canons and catechisms and were infused into the institutional norms of the social structure. Eventually, they developed a structural basis of their own in religious-moral institutions. Evidently, the emergence of this cultural superstructure and organizational basis did not make practical morality disappear from the everyday life of society, although it did exert a definite influence upon the moral dimension of situated social interaction. The degree of influence varied, depending on the plausibility and successful diffusion of an elevated moral rhetoric and a moral vocabulary of motives, and depending on the degree of institutional enforcement of moral dogmas and catechisms.

In modern societies homogeneous, unitary moral orders of this kind are no longer embedded in the social structure. Notions of good and bad, right and wrong, nonetheless continue to be relevant to the conduct of life and, concretely, to the planning, execution and evaluation of one's own and other people's actions. 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, by intermediary institutions. These begin with the family and peer groups and may include local branches of larger societal groups, association and institutions such as civic organizations, clubs, religious congregations, and schools, seminars and academies. Intermediary institutions are also the main source of at least partial enforcement of such moralities in the interaction order. Modern societies, too, have their own varieties of morality-in-use.

When we complain about others or accuse them of misdeeds of one kind or another, when we apologize for our own actions and faults, when we become indignant and invite others to join in our indignation, when we praise and condemn, 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. Thereby we keep proving to others, as others are demonstrating to us, that some kind of morality is still practised everywhere.

In a series of investigations my colleagues and I at first devoted our efforts to the description and analysis of the most important *forms* employed in the concrete processes of moral communication. 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 more than a little about the moral sense articulated in these forms. We glimpsed the contours of the repertoire of moral communication in contemporary German society. Most, although not all the observed features would probably find their analogue in other comparable societies.<sup>5</sup>

If any evidence above and beyond our own intuition and observation as practising members of our societies was needed for the conclusion that the prophecies of doom concerning a general decline and destruction of morals in modern society are wrong, then the data collected in these investigations amply provide it.<sup>6</sup> 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 a single and uniform morality does not persist modern society. We, and others like us, follow different moral norms. It is an open question whether these diverse moralities contain something like a common moral depth-grammar.

## V. Moralities and Styles of Moralizing

In the introductory remarks I distinguished between positive and negative moralizing and between direct and indirect moralizing. Incidentally, one gains the impression from our sets of data that negative moralizing is the preferred form of moral communication in contemporary German society. I venture the guess that, allowing for slight cultural variation, the same preference will be encountered in other modern societies in the Western world. Communicative forms and genres in which fairly direct moralizing occurs in face-to-face situations include gossip, complaints, and joint indignation sequences as well as dialogical analogues of moral sermonizing. In the mass media, from books to radio and television, some of the face-to-face forms and genres are employed with certain modifications. Some programs may serve as public indignation *fora*, others take up complaints, still others rest on gossip. In addition, some new mass-media genres with moralizing functions emerged, such as a restrained German variant of condensed TV-evangelism, and secular moral sermons by people in high office presumed to have some moral authority.



Although I cannot even try to summarize the results of these investigations, I should like to select a few examples. They all support the obvious general proposition that there is no central institutional moral authority, as well as the less obvious proposition that there is much practical morality to be found everywhere, and that this morality-in-use consists of several different kinds. The question whether there is an underlying common base to the empirical varieties must remain open.

Thus, for example, the family is, of course, the earliest and remains as the main social medium in the transmission of moral values. Some types of families continue to transmit traditional morality. The dominant type, however, abstains from the propagation of specific and authoritative moral norms, stressing instead the autonomy of the individual. Counseling – which proliferates in modern societies with complex social distributions of knowledge – shows some formal similarity to the dominant family type: it stresses individual choice and tends to reject any transindividual source of moral authority. In a way, morality is defined as the problem, not as the solution.<sup>7</sup> This holds at least for most non-church-related family and sexual counseling. It is reasonable to assume that both the family and the counseling apparatus represent a somewhat passive adjustment to the pluralistic situation which characterizes most modern societies. Specific moral values are, however, propagated not only by (some) traditional religious bodies but by social movements of diverse kinds. Among the recent moral entrepreneurs in Germany the ecological “movement,” with its eschatological mind-set, ascetic morals and missionary activity is a rather successful case in point.

Although one must keep in mind the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence about the following observations, there are good reasons for assuming that during the past several generations a shift occurred in the preferred style of moralizing. 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 conduct of individual members of various groups and milieus continues to be evaluated by other members according to some conception of what is right and what is wrong. However, outside the home groups and milieus, there will be considerable uncertainty whether the criteria of evaluation are shared with others.

Differences in moral orientations existed even in traditional societies with a fairly homogeneous moral order. There probably was some interactive, more specifically, moral and moralizing uncertainty in all but the simplest archaic communities. However, the structure of social interaction in the little communities of traditional society minimized that uncertainty. In the more complex patterns of social interaction in the traditional old civilizations, especially in their urban segments, individuals who did not know each other, or did not know each other well, could not entirely avoid the risk of moral uncertainty. 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 carried much information on a person's moral status. Of course, when dealing with actual or potential moral deviants, one may have been inclined or obliged to accept the risk of moral conflict.

In pluralistic modern life, on the contrary, interactional, moral and moralizing uncertainty is high outside an individual's own home group or milieu. In societies with an obligatory and uniform moral order, moral homogeneity between individuals could be assumed unless concrete evidence to the contrary was produced in interaction. One may say that in modern societies the reverse is the case. Moral homogeneity can not be assumed until positive evidence for it is produced. In Schutzian terms: the idealization of the congruency of the systems of relevancies, a constitutive part of the general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives, is stood on its head (Cf. Schutz, 1962a: 11; and b: 315f).

When interaction is not restricted to narrowly functional, highly anonymous social roles, it is likely that a certain degree of moral homogeneity is useful or even essential for its accomplishment. Invitations to joint indignation, gossip, *etc.*, are inherently risky for persons who do not know each other well. Obviously, under such conditions the specific form of communicative interaction that carries the strongest risk of moral uncertainty and potential conflict is direct moralizing. Other things being equal, this aspect of modern life is likely to encourage a strong preference for an indirect style of moral communication. Such a style will be preferred in all communication outside the home milieus of the individuals. Furthermore, one might speculate that under certain conditions this style would diffuse into moral communication even in home milieus.

It should be remembered that indirect moralizing did not first emerge in modern society. It appears, however, that in various types of non-modern societies such a style arose only under special conditions and only in certain milieus and that it was limited to a few kinds of communicative situations. In modern societies, on the other hand, it seems to have come to mark most "inter-milieu" communication and, as I just speculated, it is not entirely unlikely that this style has also spread beyond the interactional domain in which its adoption was favored by structural causes into much "intra-milieu" moralizing.

It should be also kept in mind that the guess about the predominance of indirect moralizing does not imply that in modern societies no one moralizes directly any more. It is likely that in groups and milieus in which moral homogeneity can be assumed by the participants in communicative interaction, there are no grounds to prefer indirect moralizing. Our findings support this

assumption. Such a style will be only employed if it diffuses into these groups or milieus for other reasons. There is some evidence for that in family communication and even in the religious television program that was investigated in our study (by Ruth Ayass). However, we do not yet have the broad sweep of data necessary to map out the repertoires of different communicative milieus according to the predominance of direct and indirect styles of moralizing. Nonetheless, the main contours of the situation did emerge.

In non-modern societies families 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 modern society this is no longer the case, and while a certain amount of direct moralizing is likely to occur wherever asymmetrical relationships still prevail (*e.g.*, between adults and very young children) and between peers who know each other well, generally, indirect moralizing probably will be preferred.

Communities of life such as the family are no longer necessarily communities of like-minded people (*Gesinnungsgemeinschaften*). At the same time, various kinds of such communities proliferate in modern societies. Interactional risks of the kind described do not exist in them. It is only in external relations that moral homogeneity cannot be assumed. There, adherents of moral-ideological communities have two basic options. Either they adopt the indirect style in order to remain morally inconspicuous, or they accept the risk and engage in direct moralizing, thereby inevitably becoming moral entrepreneurs. However, genuine choice between the options may be open to 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 of those belonging to a proselytizing type, the option to remain inconspicuous is not available. The group may expect and demand testimony.

Another aspect relevant to the situation is that in modern societies moral enterprises often do not present themselves as such. It seems that only the more traditional kinds of *Gesinnungsgemeinschaften*, especially those of a fundamentalist persuasion, are still willing to declare themselves. It is noteworthy that many of the newer moral-ideological communities follow a different strategy. Many of them put on scientific, medical, therapeutic, *etc.*, facades. On a structural level, this may be considered a form of indirection.

Indirect as such moralizing is, it is a form of moral communication. It presupposes an elementary reciprocity of perspectives, and an underlying intersubjectivity, even though it is motivated by the breakdown of the idealization of the congruence of the systems of relevance. To transplant a sentence from Schutz's essay on Mozart and the philosophers into another context: *Nevertheless, even in antagonism they are bound together in an intersubjective situation of a community, in a We.* (Schutz, 1964)

**APPENDIX: Examples of indirect moralizing**1. *Why constructions*

(THE TELEPHONE OPERATOR)\*

(\*indicates translation from German data)

S. calls information and asks for the phone number of a family called “Weisser” in Constance.

- 12 A I have no family WEISSER in Constance.  
 13 only a family WEISS  
 14 S: yes I think they live on the Reichenau  
 15 and actually not directly in Constance  
 16 A (brusquely) WHY did you say CONSTANCE then  
 17 S I am sorry I thought the Reichenau belongs to CONSTANCE  
 18 (2.5)  
 18  
 19 A: well then the number is

2. *“I don’t understand” constructions*

(ANTJE AND PAUL)\*

- 1 A: ok good, but it doesn’t get you anywhere if you  
 2 P: [haja]  
 3 it won’t get me anywhere but  
 4 A: if you think about now you just have to first of all see  
 5 how you can get your stuff put in order  
 6 hh I eh I don’t understand I don’t understand either  
 7 why you just don’t call whatchamacallhim in Stuttgart  
 8 and say that when you do your practical semester now,  
 9 that you then would like to – next semester continue  
 10 in Stuttgart again

3. *Reconstructions (direct/indirect example)*

(CHINESE STUDENT AND GERMAN LANGUAGE TEACHER)\*

- 86 Hu: then the secretary of the party at that time ya  
 87 S: [mhm]  
 88 Hu: confronted me  
 89 S: [mhm] (.....)  
 .  
 .  
 97 Hu: other people then, wanted to  
 98 confronted me. WHY don’t you ACT  
 99 like the others like your fellow students  
 101 dress up so fancy  
 102 S ((filled with indignation)) oh yeah

4. *Litotes*

(WE GERMANS)\*

- 42 H: we Germans you have to look at it this way sometimes  
 43 don’t always behave in just the right way  
 44 it’s not always very good

5. *Overall indirect constructions*  
(GENETIC COUNSELING)\*
- 23 KM we would like to have children ourselves  
24 we actually like children: I like them and my wife  
25 B: I think, well, I would actually  
26 KM: I think  
27 B: see no reason that one would for that reason  
28 KM: hm.  
29 B: go without children  
30 KM: hm. (7.0) it was actually interesting that they ....

*Other forms of indirectness and obliqueness*

Euphemisms, disfluences, false starts, reformulations, jocular modulations, prosodic devices: (complaining tone, brusque tone *etc.* with semantically neutral, non-moralizing utterances).

## Notes

1. The Alfred Schutz Memorial Lecture, delivered at the meetings of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, Denver, 1998 and co-sponsored by the SPHS, the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and the American Philosophical Association. I should like to express my gratitude for having been invited to deliver the Alfred Schutz Memorial Lecture. It offers me an opportunity to pay homage to the scholar who most directly and lastingly influenced my thinking as a philosopher and social scientist. When Alvin Johnson offered me a scholarship at the Graduate Faculty of the New School, Schutz entered my life almost by accident. That was about forty seven years ago. Ever since that time he remained my intellectual guide – very much by choice.
2. The main parts of what follows 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. The latest version, *The Moral Order of Modern Societies, Moral Communication and Indirect Moralising*, was delivered as Public Lecture No. 17 at the Collegium Budapest/Institute of Advanced Study in March 1997. Comments made at the several occasions were helpful in arriving at this final version. Cf. also Luckmann, 1996.
3. The only extended discussion of which I am aware is at second remove, as it were, in the account of Max Scheler's position. (Cf. Schutz, 1966)
4. In some traditions of moral philosophy, certain elementary emotions (sympathy, empathy) were taken to be not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition of morality, its sole source.
5. The investigations were sponsored by the German Science Foundation and directed by Jörg Bergmann and myself. Since this lecture was delivered, the results were published (Bergmann, J. and Luckmann, T., Eds., 1999). A related study of moral communication in intermediary institutions, organized by me, was supported by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Luckmann, T., Ed. 1998). My associates were Jörg Bergmann, Gabriela Christmann, Michaela Goll, Angela Keppler, Hubert Knoblauch and Ska Wiltschek.
6. 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, of

religious and secular conversion stories, of gossip in informal and institutional settings, of emergency calls to a fire department, of professional family, sexual and genetic counselling sessions, of admission interviews in psychiatric wards, of various kinds of radio call-in-programs, of meetings of local ecology groups, of public debates (on the Gulf War, for example) both *in vivo* and on television, of religious program series on television, of a regional anti-smoking campaign, of public speeches and addresses (e.g., 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), etc.

However, a few limitations should be noted. With the exception of a few American and Chinese transcripts they are restricted to Germany, the bulk of the data being of southern provenance. 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. The validity of the assertion that morality-in-use is pervasive in modern society is not in doubt. However, questions on the distribution of the styles and repertoires of moral communication and, correspondingly, questions about the differences and similarities of moral sense cannot be answered with certainty even regarding Germany and assertions about other, structurally comparable societies must, at present, remain rather speculative.

7. This formulation is taken from the contribution to the Bertelsmann Foundation volume mentioned above by Jörg Bergmann, Michaela Goll and Ska Wiltschek.

## References

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