

Michigan Philosophy News

for friends, alumni, and alumnae of the Department of Philosophy,
The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Fall, 1990

Dear Friends of the Department:

It is a clear and cool day outside as I write, a day much like one this past spring when we celebrated the graduation of a group of some forty or so new Michigan Philosophy B.A.'s. Several years ago we began to mark this passage with a luncheon. And so again, on that beautiful day this past May, we all met to celebrate together — faculty, new graduates, and their families.

The undergraduate philosophy concentration at Michigan has taken on renewed vigor and excitement in the past ten years. The number of concentrators has roughly tripled during that period, and the intensity of extracurricular philosophical activity has increased as well. In the earlier part of the past decade, the Department rethought the concentration and restructured it around a new set of required core courses. From time to time since then we have fine tuned the program, in general opting for requirements that challenge students actively to develop their philosophical skills. Throughout this period the concentration has shown remarkable growth as the number of bright, highly motivated undergraduate philosophers moving through our program has consistently increased. So it was with real pride and excitement that we celebrated together this past May. The philosophy concentration demands a lot of highly talented students, and this group had excelled, as have past classes.

Another especially pleasant memory of this past year was the presence in Ann Arbor (also in May) of Anne Stevenson to receive the Alumnae Association's Athena Award. Anne Stevenson is a highly acclaimed poet and biographer. Many of you are likely to remember her father, Charles Stevenson, who was a beloved member of the Department from 1946 to 1977. In addition to her poetry, Anne Stevenson is best known for a recent biography of Sylvia Plath. On receiving the award, she spoke movingly of her days as a Michigan undergraduate, with the Philosophy Department always in the background, and read an elegy to her father which is included in her recent collection, *The Other House*, published by Oxford University Press. We hope to include this poem in a subsequent *MPN*.

Professors Brandt, Burks, and Frankena continue to flourish as *emeriti* in Ann Arbor. Last year Art and Alice Burks were awarded the University of Michigan Press Award for their book, *The First Electronic Computer: The Atanasoff Story*, published by the Press. Dick Brandt visited the University of California at Irvine in the spring where he taught a course in ethics. Otherwise, he and Bill Frankena continued to "chair" the traditional twice weekly "ethics lunch" that they began many years ago for faculty and senior graduate students working on ethics.

The last year was a good one for the Philosophy Department in a number of ways. In the last two years we welcomed Crispin Wright and Gideon Rosen to the faculty. This year we will welcome a new senior faculty member, Alan Code. Code is a specialist on Aristotle's metaphysics who has taught for many years at the University of California at Berkeley. He will be

joining the Department in January and will hold a joint appointment with the Classics Department. Code's research and teaching interests nicely complement those of Professor Nick White. Together they will make Michigan a very attractive place to study ancient philosophy.

Two members of our faculty were promoted last year. Paul Boghossian was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, and Peter Railton was promoted to Full Professor. Boghossian's research and teaching concentrate on issues in the philosophies of language and mind, areas that have become the focus of increasingly intense interest in recent years. Peter Railton has made important contributions both in the philosophy of science and in moral and political philosophy. Railton was also named a Thurnau Professor last fall. The Thurnau Professorship is a three year position awarded to a small number of faculty at the University in recognition of excellence in teaching. Another member of our faculty, Jack Meiland, was awarded a Thurnau Professorship the previous fall.

Our faculty also recorded impressive research achievements this past year. Last spring Ken Walton and Allan Gibbard published important and eagerly awaited books. Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* was published by Harvard University Press. In it, Walton gives a comprehensive treatment of fundamental philosophical problems concerning the representational arts through the hypothesis that these involve various forms of make-believe. Gibbard's *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* was published by Harvard University Press in this country and Oxford University Press in Britain and Europe. You will have a chance to sample some of Gibbard's ideas in the essay that follows. We also received word late this past spring that Allan Gibbard was elected both to the Michigan Society of Fellows and to the American Academy of Sciences — high honors indeed!

The beginning of last year was marked by the publication, by Princeton University Press, of David Velleman's *Practical Reflection*, a work which propounds a challenging, highly original, and integrated approach to the theory of action. As you know, books are not the only, or even the primary method of presenting philosophical research, but there is hardly space to describe the articles our faculty has published over the past year.

Research is important intrinsically, but also because it drives much of our teaching. Good philosophical teaching requires the active involvement of students in philosophical thinking. By conveying some of the excitement we feel about ideas we encounter and develop in our own research, faculty draw students into active philosophizing themselves. Since coming to Michigan six years ago, I have continued to be impressed by the commitment of the Departmental faculty to teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. I mentioned above that both Peter Railton and Jack Meiland hold Thurnau Professorships in recognition of their superb teaching. And this past spring, Louis Loeb received an LS&A Teaching Excellence Award. Of course,

it is much easier to care about teaching when students respond as eagerly as they do at Michigan.

The Undergraduate Philosophy Club continued to be active last year. In the fall, they sponsored a speaker, Professor Alvin Plantinga from the University of Notre Dame, who gave a talk on the philosophy of religion and met informally with students. The Club also held luncheon meetings with members of the faculty throughout the year, and began to work toward some form of publication for undergraduate philosophical work.

In the graduate program, things went well last year as well. Generous funding from the College enabled us to open a graduate study room, containing 32 carrels and five computer workstations, on the second floor of Angell Hall. This space offers a superb environment for graduate student work. We also began a newly reformed graduate program, and perhaps the best news is that we made it through the first year! The program substitutes a fairly complex set of requirements for the old preliminary examinations, and it will take a while for us to learn all the ins and outs and do necessary fine tuning. One goal is to help students move through the program in a more timely fashion. During the very lean employment years of the seventies and eighties, the amount of time necessary to get a Ph.D. in philosophy rose considerably, both nationally and at Michigan. Now that the employment picture is beginning to look better, especially in the long term, it makes sense to take advantage of this trend to enable students to move through the program more quickly. In 1988-89 we granted five Ph.D.'s, and last year we granted four. This coming year we will almost certainly grant at least four. These numbers mark an increase over the recent past.

Partly, of course, graduate students are encouraged to finish their studies simply by enhanced opportunities of academic employment. And here the experiences of recent Michigan Ph.D.'s have been very encouraging indeed. This last year, our students and recent former students received offers of tenure track positions from Arkansas State, California State at Northridge, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Ohio State, St. Louis, South Carolina, Southern Methodist, Temple, and Tulane, as well as offers of temporary appointment at Florida and Cincinnati.

Michigan graduate students have also been winning impressive national honors. The Charlotte Newcombe Foundation awards some six to eight dissertation fellowships nationally to philosophy graduate students who are writing in moral and political philosophy. For next year, two of these will be Michigan students: Sigrun Svarvarsdottir and Dan Goldberg. Indeed, Michigan graduate students have won Newcombe Fellowships in each of the last *four* years, including two in one other year — a remarkable record of achievement.

As you know, we have come to depend increasingly on gifts and bequests from friends and alumni to make possible the extraordinary support for philosophical activity at Michigan. The Tanner Library continues to be a jewel — a place where undergraduates, graduates, and faculty alike can come at any time to find virtually any important philosophical book or article they need. The Library was begun and expanded with gifts from Obert Tanner. We have been able to maintain this virtually

unparalleled departmental philosophical library with gifts from alumni and friends, and with the continued support of Obert Tanner, including a generous gift this past year.

Gifts from friends and alumni support our activities in many other ways. Very generous gifts from Malcolm Denise each year continue to enhance the Denise Philosophy Endowment, which provides much needed support to the research of junior faculty. And gifts from so many more of you helped to fund the Undergraduate Philosophy Club.

A substantial bequest many years ago from James B. and Grace J. Nelson makes possible the Nelson-Philosopher-in-Residence as well as our speakers program. This last year Bernard Williams, of the University of California at Berkeley, visited the Department for a week as the Nelson philosopher, presented a public lecture and two seminars, and met informally with faculty and students. We had a very full schedule of outside speakers throughout the year, including Anthony Brueckner, Catherine Elgin, Richard Grandy, Anil Gupta, Susan Haack, Bob Hale, William Lycan, Vann McGee, and Mark Richard. The topic of our annual spring colloquium was laws of nature and it included Bas van Fraassen of Princeton, Stephen Schiffer of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and John Earman of the University of Pittsburgh, as well as Gideon Rosen and Larry Sklar from our own Department, and Sarah Patterson, who held a visiting position with us last year. Finally, the Department is very fortunate to administer the Tanner Lecture at Michigan. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values are endowed at nine universities around the world, and over the years we have invited to Michigan a broad range of speakers. In March, Carol Gilligan of the Harvard University School of Education presented the 1989-90 Tanner Lecture: "Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls, and Women" to an overflow crowd of almost two thousand in the Rackham Auditorium. The following morning several hundred attended a symposium on the Lecture which included Richard Wollheim, Professor of Philosophy, University of California at Berkeley, Judith Stacey, Professor of Sociology, University of California at Davis, and Mary Brabeck, Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology, Boston College.

That brings you more or less up to date on what's been going on this past year in Ann Arbor. We are very happy this year to be able to include the piece just following by Allan Gibbard which provides a fascinating glimpse of some of the leading ideas of *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. Before I close, however, let me say how very much those of us presently in Ann Arbor appreciate your support. When you take the trouble to respond with your notes and contributions it reminds us vividly of what Michigan philosophy has meant to so many people over the years.

Sincerely,



Stephen L. Darwall
Chair

MORAL JUDGMENT*

Why ponder our lives? At one extreme, the question is not a live one. We are a pondering species—and not each by himself; we are conversants. Silence is a discipline; too much is torment, as children learn in school. Sometimes we discuss earnestly, and in any case we banter and tease; we quarrel and sulk. We gossip and tell stories, with verve if we can. These things engage us; is that because they have point? Are they ways of working matters through with each other, or playing them through? Even when we are not pondering outright, we are caught up in equivalents.

With human beings it was always so. The !Kung of the Kalihari are hunter-gatherers, and perhaps in them we can see what our hunting-gathering forbears were like. "Conversation in a !Kung encampment is a constant sound like the sound of a brook, and as low and lapping, except for shrieks of laughter. People cluster together in little groups during the day, talking, perhaps making artifacts at the same time. At night, families talk late by their fires, or visit at other family fires with their children between their knees or in their arms if the wind is cold."¹ The !Kung criticize each other, they gossip, they make oblique hints; they tell about events, about comings and goings, and about past hunts. They plan their hunts, and the successful hunter may consult on the proper distribution of his kill. Occasionally they quarrel, and frequently they talk about gifts and their suitability.

Conversation, then, is far more than a carrier of bald information. In talk we work out not only what to believe about things and events and people, but how to live. We work out how to feel about things in our lives, and in the lives of others. Not that we strive always to get to the root of things: We think not so much how to live and to feel on the whole, but about one thing or another, as it catches our attention.

Socrates was different. Plato has him saying to the jury, "If... I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is." When Socrates spoke of a life without such examination, he warned of a way a person might really live, that most people do live perhaps. What Socrates himself did, and the sophists before him, was start from the materials of common thought and speech, and refine them. Socrates's path is avoidable—and yet not always with ease. We think and talk by nature, and whoever thinks and talks can be led, unless he is careful, into wider questions. That may not be what makes everyone's life worth living, but it grows out of parts of our being we could not be without. The !Kung are not Socratic, so far as I know, but Socrates and the !Kung both are of our species.

In the book I ask about Socrates's quest, the broad examination of how to live. To ponder how to live, to reason about how to live, is in effect to ask what kind of life it is rational to live. I offer no special answer to this question; my first worry is what the question is. What does it mean to call an alternative rational,

or another irrational? That is the puzzle of the book, and my hope is that from working on it, we can learn things worth learning about ourselves and about our questions.

In part the question how to live is moral—perhaps in whole. Once broad questions grip us, we shall want to know where morality fits in. What kind of morality, if any, would be worth heeding? Or does the rational life do without morality? Here again my puzzle will be what the questions are. Again I want to know what 'rational' means, and in addition I want to understand this talk of morality. What are moral questions; what do they mean? What, if anything, do they have to do with rationality?

The tie of morals to reason supports the whole of moral theory—perhaps. In any case, moral theories abound that say what the tie is or what it is not. They tell us whose good, if anyone's, reason commands we promote, but different theories tell us different things. Hume said that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." Kant said the commands of morality are categorical demands of reason, and "reason issues inexorable commands without promising anything to the inclinations." Sidgwick said that the good is happiness, and that "as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally,—so far as it is attainable by my efforts," and not at my own happiness in particular. He thought also, though, that an egoist could evade this claim, and that in a "recognized conflict between duty and self-interest, practical reason" would be "divided against itself." Recent writers are divided against each other. Phillipa Foot writes, "if justice is not a good to the just man, moralists who recommend it as a virtue are perpetrating a fraud." David Gauthier maintains that reason demands maximally satisfying one's own desires, but under constraints that would be agreed to in certain ideal conditions. Thomas Nagel argues for pure impartiality between oneself and others. "In any situation in which there is reason for one person to promote some end, we must be able to discover an end which there is reason for anyone to promote, should he be in a position to do so." Thinking about reason sets people tugging apart. It would be good to see what might be at issue.

My puzzle, then, is about Socrates, but it is also about the !Kung. I ask about moral philosophy, but also about everyday, non-philosophical life and thought and talk. The two kinds of talk are not the same, but one grows out of the other. As part of a human way of living, we think and discuss what it makes sense to do, and how it makes sense to feel about things. This thought and talk contains its own nudges toward refinement, and responding to them makes for stronger nudges still. Wise choices and apt feelings figure in talk at both extremes: in refined, self-conscious philosophizing and in everyday banter and quarrel. I want to know what is at stake in normative talk of both kinds.

1 A Sketch

The proposal in the book goes like this: Start with morality. We can understand the term broadly or narrowly. Broadly the moral question is how to live. Narrowly, we might try saying,

morality concerns moral sentiments: the sentiments of guilt and resentment and their variants. Moral wrongs are acts to be avoided on pain of these sentiments' applying. Morality in this narrow sense is a narrow part of life, but still perhaps, something we need as a set of constraints. It seems worth while examining these constraints and asking whether they should matter.

To feel guilt or resentment is not in itself to make a moral judgement. A person can feel guilty and yet think he has done no wrong. He then thinks it makes no sense to feel the way he does, that his feelings are irrational. Narrowly moral judgments are not feelings but judgments about feelings. They are judgments of what moral feelings it is rational to have, of how it makes sense to feel about kinds of things people can do. Feelings, we think, can be apt or not, and moral judgments are judgments of when guilt and resentment are apt.

Saying this requires that we understand rationality. We must talk not only of wise choices, but of apt feelings too. What would a theory of rationality tell us? What does it mean to call something rational or irrational, a choice wise or foolish, a feeling apt or off the mark? My question shifts, then from morality specifically: I take up rationality in general.

To call a thing "rational" is to endorse it in some way. That suggests a scheme for getting at the meaning of the term. Instead of trying to define a property "rationality" by giving conditions under which a thing would have that property or lack it, start with the use of the term. Fix on the dictum. "To call a thing rational is to endorse it," and search for a sense of "endorse" for which the dictum holds true.

The word "rational" has a learned flavor, but the notion I have in mind is familiar. It is the one we use when we talk about "what it makes sense" to do or to believe, or when we speak of "the wise choice" in a situation. It is the one we use when ask what we "ought" to do, or search for the "best thing to do", in a way that does not already presuppose we are talking morality. With feelings, it is the notion we use when we talk of anger, say, as warranted, or of pity as apt or misdirected. There does seem to be a common thought in all these turns of phrase, even if shades of meaning differ; one test is that to affirm one of an action or feeling while denying another is to invite puzzlement. I shall be using the learned term 'rational' in this broad way. It carries a kind of direct and flavorless endorsement, taken from the point of view of the person whose acts or feelings are being assessed. The rational act is what it makes sense to do, the right choice on the occasion. A rational feeling is an apt feeling, a warranted feeling, a way it makes sense to feel about something. The term 'rational' may carry narrower suggestions, but this broad, endorsing reading is the one I need.

What is it, then, for an act or a way of feeling to be rational? In what way does a person who calls something rational endorse it? Cryptically put, my answer is this: To call something rational is to express one's acceptance of norms that permit it. This formula applies to almost anything that can be appraised as rational or irrational—persons aside. It applies to the rationality of actions, and it applies to the rationality of beliefs and feelings. We assess a wide range of things as rational or irrational, and it

is puzzling how this can be. The analysis offers an answer.

"To call something rational is to express one's acceptance of norms that permit it." This is only a first sketch, and it raises many questions. What is it to accept norms? Acceptance is a state of mind, to be picked out by its place in a rough psychological theory. The capacity to accept norms I portray as a human biological adaptation; accepting norms figures in a peculiarly human system of motivation and control that depends on language. Norms make for human ways of living, and we can understand our normative life as part of the natural world.

Normative talk is part of nature, but it does not describe nature. In particular, the analysis says, a person who calls something rational or irrational is not describing his own state of mind; he is expressing it. To call something rational is not to attribute some particular property to that thing—not even the property of being permitted by the norms someone accepts. The analysis is not directly of what it is for something to *be* rational, but of what it is for someone to *judge* that something is rational. We explain the term by saying what state of mind it expresses. In this sense the analysis is *expressivistic*, and in too big a mouthful, I call it the *norm-expressivistic analysis*.

The analysis is non-cognitivist in the narrow sense that, according to it, to call a thing rational is not to state a matter of fact, either truly or falsely. None of this leaves normative language defective or second-rate. The analysis explains why we need normative language, and as it takes shape, it ascribes to rationality many of the features on which theories of normative fact insist. In many ways, normative judgments mimic factual judgments, and indeed factual judgments themselves rest on norms—norms for belief. Normative discussion is much like factual discussion, I shall be claiming, and just as indispensable.

Part of my concern, then, is to understand morality, but my total concern is much wider. Morality narrowly glossed is a part of broadly normative life in general. Diverse aspects of life are governed by norms: action, and also belief and feeling. A good account of humanity will include a story of norms, a story of psychic mechanisms that make for their acceptance. The story will show these mechanisms in interaction, and exhibit their adaptive rationale. We need not only this, however—a theoretical account of ourselves as a part of nature, an account as if from afar. As we lead our normative lives we need a sense of what we are doing, a picture of ourselves that can guide us. The ways we see norms should cohere with our best naturalistic accounts of normative life, and it is here that an expressivistic analysis gets its job. We experience our lives in normative terms, in terms of things it makes sense to do, to think, and to feel. The analysis joins this experience to the detached, scientific perspective. It tells what we can see ourselves as doing as we engage in normative inquiry and discussion.

Above all, I hope, the analysis will help us understand why it matters what is rational. Deciding what sorts of things are rational is deciding what norms to accept in various realms. The point of the book is to ask what this involves. We can picture human normative life as a part of nature, but that might leave us at a loss as to how to engage in that normative life. My first step

toward engagement is to try to puzzle through what normative questions are.

2 Evolutionary Explanations

How are we to understand our normative life as part of nature? The key must be that human beings live socially; we are, in effect, designed for social life. Our normative capacities are part of the design.

This much may be a truism, but it should also be puzzling. The initial puzzle is in what sense we are designed at all. Darwin and his successors answered that: we result not from design literally, but from that remarkable surrogate for design, genetic variation and natural selection. The deeper puzzle then is what we could expect humans to be like on the basis of Darwinian considerations. If we grapple with this puzzle, the picture that emerges must be familiar in many ways—after all, we know a lot about our species apart from evolutionary thinking. There may be patterns, though, that had not been recognized.

The key to human moral nature, I suggest, lies in coordination broadly conceived. The need for complex coordination stands behind much of the way language works in our thoughts, in our feelings, and in social life. It figures centrally in our emotional dispositions, especially for such morally significant emotions as outrage, guilt, shame, respect, moral admiration, and moral inspiration. Matters of coordination, on the picture I shall sketch, stand squarely behind the psychology of norms, and hence behind what is involved in thinking something rational or irrational. Primitive human life is intensely social. In the conditions under which we evolved, anyone's prospects for survival and reproduction depended crucially on the beneficial human bonds he could cultivate. Human cooperation has always rested on a refined network of kinds of human rapport, supported by emotion and thought. A person sustains and develops this network, draws advantages from it, and on occasion keeps his distance from aspects of it. He does these things only in virtue of a refined configuration of emotional and cognitive dispositions. It is this picture of human biology that might represent us, however crudely, still as recognizably human.

Biological pictures of humanity need not be simplistic. They need not depict us as rough, bestial creatures, stripped of what makes us most delightfully and inspiringly human. It is easy to paint such a picture, and much of behavioral human biology may do so, but that cannot be adequate biology. We are evolved animals, and so biological evolution must account for our potentialities. If a theory misses some of them, it is in that regard a defective biological theory. Inevitably, of course, any theory we can manage will be too crude, but we should do as well as we can. The challenge is to work for more richly successful theories—theories that combine biological rigor with a humanistic eye for the complexities of the human psyche. We should draw on the anthropologist's sense of the scope of cultural variation and the typical patterns of human life, and on analytical tools from the social sciences. All this should be our ideal, even if every time we try we must settle for something less.

Good evolutionary treatments of human life will be indirect. Not much genetic change, it is generally thought, occurred in our ancestry in the couple of hundred generations since our ancestors turned to agriculture. We are genetically adapted to hunting and gathering. Our hunting-gathering ancestors had genetic make-ups typical of us, and the interplay of those genotypes with their environments resulted in those dispositions in virtue of which our ancestors' genes were passed on, and later formed us. Our genes gave us the propensities we had at conception—propensities to have certain characteristics in various hunting-gathering environments. That tells us nothing directly about what we are like in fact, in our own environments.

The hope for explanation must lie in tractably simple patterns. A characteristic may enhance survival and reproduction among hunting-gathering societies, and stem from a genotype that produces it in a wide range of environments. Hunter-gatherers talk, joke, and chide, and so do we. What I shall be suggesting is broad propensities to accept norms, engage in normative discussion, and to act, believe, and feel in ways that are somewhat guided by the norms one has accepted. I shall be exploring the shape of broad emotional propensities concerning such things as resentment, guilt, shame, and moral inspiration. The ways these propensities manifest themselves may differ sharply across different kinds of societies, but common elements may be discernible.

Even tractable evolutionary pictures need not show us as rigid and acultural. We evolved as culture emerged through our evolving. We evolved to have flexible genetic propensities—propensities to be affected profoundly in response to culture. We evolved to interact with others, in response to culture, in ways that themselves constitute having a culture. We acquired not a shapeless capacity for culture, but perhaps a whole configuration of adaptations to the kinds of cultures humans form and sustain. In early human environments, successful acculturation must have been crucial to one's prospects. The evolutionary twist to explanation is to look for complex, more or less flexible propensities we may have, and see how they might contribute to an individual's prospects for reproduction, in a variety of primitive cultural, social, and natural settings.

My theory of the meaning of moral terms rests on a psychology of norms. The relevant psychology is not sitting neatly arranged on library shelves, and I am forced to be speculative. That, to be sure, gives the philosophy an uncertain empirical base—but I do not think either that we can develop good fundamental theory independently of empirical considerations, or that the empirical findings we need are firmly established. We need to go by our best guesses. The general line I take can, no doubt, be developed independently of the detailed psychological speculation in which I embed it. It would be difficult, though, to work out exactly how empirically robust each part of the theory is. What I say, then, should be read as having a conditional form: If the psychological facts were roughly as I speculate, here is what might be said philosophically.

3 Rationality and Morality

We appraise a wide variety of human attributes as rational or irrational. Not only can a person act rationally or irrationally, but he can believe rationally or irrationally, and he can be angry or grateful or envious rationally or irrationally. It is irrational, say to be angry at the messenger who brings bad tidings, but rational to be angry at the miscreant who deliberately wrongs one. Or at least this, I take it, is what we tend to think in the normal course of life. If the word "rational" seems overly learned here, substitutes come with a more homely flavor: "It doesn't make sense" to be angry at the person who brings bad news he had no part in making. The anger "isn't warranted". You "shouldn't be grateful" to someone who benefited you only inadvertently in seeking his own gain.

None of this is to say that when we call something "rational"—an act, belief, or emotion—we are saying anything intelligible. That remains to be seen. I am saying that we talk and think as if such appraisals are intelligible. It may be worth while, then, to see if we can interpret them as intelligible.

First, though, let me turn to morality and its tie to rationality. Suppose naively, then, that we know what "rational" means; only later do I get to an analysis of the term.

In the history of moral philosophy, there seem to be at least two sharply different conceptions of what morality is. On the broadest of conceptions, morality is simply practical rationality in the fullest sense: to say that an act is morally right is to say that it is rational. Sidgwick is a prime exponent of this broad conception, and perhaps Kant is; it is shared by many current writers. On this conception, it makes no sense to ask, "Is it always rational to do what is morally right?" for 'the morally right' simply means "the rational". On a narrow conception of morality, in contrast, moral considerations are just some of the considerations that bear on what it makes sense to do. Non-moral considerations matter too. On the narrow conception it is normally wrong, say, to injure others, to steal, or break one's word. It would normally not be morally wrong, though, to fritter away a day for which one had planned an enjoyable hike—however irrational that might be. On the broad conception of morality, morally right action simply is action that is truly rational, whereas on the narrow conception, an act may be truly irrational without being morally wrong. (Perhaps too an action can be morally wrong without being truly irrational.)

In Chapter 5 of *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill uses the term 'morality' in this narrow sense, and offers an account of what is distinctive about morality so taken. "Morality", he says, "pertains to what is wrong or not wrong, and to say that an act is wrong is to say that there ought to be a sanction against it, a sanction of law, of public opinion, or of conscience." The 'ought' here, Mill proposes, should be judged by the standards of the greatest happiness principle—but that is part of the normative theory Mill is giving, not a part of his analysis of the term 'morally wrong'. What I propose to do is to take over Mill's analysis of what morality is in the narrow sense, with various interpretations and modifications.

When Mill says there ought to be a sanction, let us read him as saying that a sanction is rational—or, perhaps, rationally required. Let us also drop talk of legal sanctions. Suppose, say, we think that people who overpark at parking meters ought to be fined, but that they ought not to feel guilty, and ought not to be resented by others for overparking. In that case, it seems to me, we do not think overparking morally wrong; we merely think that a price should be charged. That leaves sanctions of conscience and of public opinion: sanctions of guilt and remorse, on the one hand, and of blame, resentment, and moral outrage on the other. Thus as the proposal now stands, what a person does is *morally wrong* if and only if it is rational for him to feel guilty for doing it, and for others to resent him for doing it.

"Resent" here is in some ways the wrong term. It suggests a sense of personal injury, injury to oneself, whereas blame may well be impartial. Resentment, outrage, condemnation, indignation, blame—all these get roughly at the sentiment I want. Now all these terms suggest anger, perhaps along with a sense of justification. The sense of justification goes with my talk of rationality, and so what is left is anger of various kinds. Try this formulation, then: What a person does is *morally wrong* if and only if it is rational for him to feel guilty for having done it, and for others to be angry at him for having done it.

As the formulation stands, it is more plausible for 'reprehensible' than for 'morally wrong'. We need to ask, then, whether the wrongness of actions can be characterized in terms of reprehensibility—and I try to do that in the book. Here let me turn to the major gap in the analysis. What I have done so far is to suppose that we know what the term 'rational' means, and given that, to propose a way of interpreting an action's being "reprehensible". Now I need an analysis for the term 'rational'. Such an analysis could then be plugged into the analysis of 'reprehensible' that I have given.

What does it mean to call something "rational"? One way of tackling such a question is to psychologize it. What, we may ask, is the psychological state of *regarding* something as rational, of *taking* it to be rational, of *believing* it rational? To call an action, belief, or attitude "rational", if I am on the right track, is not to express a proposition; it is to do something else. Put roughly and cryptically, my hypothesis is that to *think something rational* is to accept norms that permit it.

If we now combine this analysis with the earlier analysis of 'reprehensible', we can derive an account of the distinction between moral norms and norms of rationality. All norms, in a sense, are norms of rationality, but moral norms in particular are norms for the rationality of guilt and resentment. The analyses given so far tell us this: (1) An observer thinks an act *morally reprehensible*, if and only if he thinks it rational for the agent to feel guilty over the act, and for others to resent the agent for it. (2) To think something 'rational' is to accept norms that prescribe it. Therefore, we may conclude, to think an act *morally reprehensible* is to accept norms that prescribe, for such a situation, guilt on the part of the agent and resentment on the part of others.

4 Normative Psychology

“To think something rational is to accept norms that permit it.” To unpack this cryptic analysis, we need an account of what it is for a person to “accept” norms.

The straightest course would be further analysis: we might look for a straightforward definition of what it means to say that a person accepts such-and-such a norm. I doubt, though, that such an analysis is possible. Philosophers are familiar with crucial terms that symie analysis. At times large numbers of philosophers have tried to analyze a concept, and all have failed. I sketch a picture that suggests that were all philosophers to turn to analyzing the “acceptance of norms”, all would fail here too.

To explain the acceptance of norms, I engage, in effect, in incipient psychological theorizing. “Accepting a norm”, I suggest, is a significant kind of psychological state that we are far from entirely understanding. We can hope not to define this state precisely, but to point to it. There is a centrally important psychological state, I suggest, that roughly fits the ordinary notion of a person’s “accepting a norm”. I say what I can about this putative state, adducing various shreds of evidence and lines of reasoning that I think lend plausibility to the claim that there is such a state. The shreds of evidence consist in part of commonsense belief and vocabulary, and in part of observation, both systematic and casual. I then announce that I am interested in whatever theoretically significant psychological state, if any, roughly fits what I have said.

My goal is not just to elucidate ordinary concepts and beliefs, but to use them as a guide. They can guide us in speculating about what an adequate scientific psychology might be like. The vague hypothesis I develop is that in a scientifically adequate psychology, there would figure a state that roughly fits the commonsense notion of “accepting a norm”. This state would figure centrally in the story of human thinking and motivation.

The speculation, in summary, is this: For many kinds of circumstances, human interactions are coordinated by psychic mechanisms similar to those that underlie animal ritual. The kind of flexible, intricate coordination required to live in human groups, though, demanded a finer mechanism. This intricate coordination is the biological function of our capacities for normative discussion. In discussion, people achieve a fine-grained coordination of actions, and of emotions that tend to action. Mutually advantageous coordination requires two chief tendencies: susceptibility to persuasion in normative discussion, and a governance of action and emotion by what, as a result of normative discussion, one accepts. People must agree, and they must act on what they agree to—or at least they must tend toward all this. Agreement stems from two things, I speculate: mutual influence, and a susceptibility to demands for consistency. Coordinated action then stems from a tendency of the norms one accepts to govern what one does and feels.

Individual advantage, it must quickly be added, has often worked to mitigate these tendencies. The human propensities that resulted from these conflicts must be complex and subtle—as indeed we find them in life.

If this speculation is on the right track, then accepting a norm is the complex syndrome I picture. It is a syndrome of tendencies to normative avowal and normative motivation. The syndrome is the work of a language-infused mechanism whose prime biological function is to coordinate: to coordinate actions directly, and to coordinate beliefs and feelings that tend toward action.

5 The Project

The overall structure of the theory is this: Narrowly moral judgments are judgments of how it makes sense to feel about things people do or might do. They concern the rationality of moral sentiments, of guilt and anger in particular. Judgments of rationality—of what it makes sense to do, to think, and to feel—are explained speculatively as states of mind of a special kind. They serve a crucial biological function in a social species that evolved refined and complex ways of living.

Here, of course, I have given only a sketch of a theory. Much remains to be done, and some of it I attempt in the book. Two long parts concern (i) the kinds of objectivity normative judgments can claim, and (ii) how we might proceed with moral inquiry if the theory in the book is roughly on target.

Allan F. Gibbard

*This essay is mostly drawn from early chapters of Allan Gibbard’s new book *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (1990), published by Harvard University Press in North America and by Oxford University Press in Europe.

¹Lorna Marshall, (1976), “Sharing, Talking, and Giving: Relief of Social Tensions among the !Kung”. Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore (eds.), *Kalihari Hunter-Gatherers* (Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 351-352.

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