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Warren Quinn was widely regarded as a moral philosopher of remarkable talent. This collection of his most important contributions to moral philosophy and the philosophy of action has been edited for publication by Philippa Foot.

Quinn laid out the foundations for an antiutilitarian moral philosophy that was critical of much contemporary work in ethics, such as the antirealism of Gilbert Harman and the neosubjectivism of Bernard Williams. Quinn's own distinctive moral theory is developed in the discussion of substantial, practical moral issues. For example, there are important pieces here on the permissibility of abortion, the justification (if any) for punishing criminals when no particular good seems likely to result, and on the distinction between killing and allowing to die, a distinction crucial to the subject of euthanasia and other topics in medical ethics. The volume would be ideally suited to upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate seminars on the foundations of ethics.

"Quinn's writings were always the product of lengthy reflection and great care and precision in argument: they are intellectually packed and elegantly written. And they make distinctive contributions at three different levels of moral philosophy: metaethics, moral theory, and applied ethics, . . . I use most of these essays in my own teaching, and they are standard references for those working in the field. Putting them together would create a book of lasting value, which displayed the range and insight of an outstanding moral philosopher."

Thomas Nagel

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Philippa Foot

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Introduction

In September 1991, at the time of Warren Quinn's sadly early death, he had completed all the papers reprinted in this volume; most had been published and even the last two were at the printers. Earlier, the Cambridge University Press had approached him about a collection of articles, and after his death I suggested that I should edit them. The selection had to be mine, but I think that Quinn himself would have agreed, first in including everything (except book reviews) published from the eighties onward and second in leaving out some earlier papers; these earlier articles show the same excellence of mind, but are not, I judge, of the same enduring interest.

With the exception of essay number 10 (an intriguing contribution to decision theory) the present papers are all on central topics of moral philosophy, and are, in spite of their rigor, such as to be comprehensible to philosophy students and even to nonphilosophers. They fall into four main categories: 1. Essays 1, 5, and 6 are critical pieces expressing Quinn's dissatisfaction with arguments advanced by other philosophers on the topic of the objectivity of moral judgment. 2. Essays 2 and 3 deal, in depth, with substantive moral issues: the first with abortion, the second with punishment. 3. Essays 8 and 9, originally written as a single paper, belong in the very important middle area between philosophical psychology and casuistry, where such concepts as *doing, allowing,* and *intending* are explored. 4. Essays 11 and 12, the most ambitious, and to my mind the most fascinating, of the papers give his own views on the crucial issue of rationality and human goodness. They will surely be the subject of much discussion in time to come; anyone not already familiar with Quinn's work could well begin with these papers.

Taken as a whole, these essays present a formidable challenge to two prevailing doctrines of the past forty or fifty years: first, util-

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itarianism and other forms of consequentialism, and second, subjectivism.

The objections to consequentialism appear especially in his work on the doctrine of double effect and on *doing* and *allowing* (essays 7[1] and 8, 1989), where Quinn gave his own account of the distinction between doing and allowing, and between intending a result and bringing it about as a side effect; arguing, against consequentialists, that both distinctions are directly relevant to questions of moral justification. There is, he says, truth in the doctrine of double effect because of our special *prima facie* right not to be made the tool of other people's purposes. And the need for special justification for doing harm as opposed to allowing it to come about, comes, he thinks, from the special authority that all persons have over the way in which others may act *on* them.

Both these articles show the importance that Quinn saw in *rights;* it was a topic that particularly interested him, and this interest comes out also in "Abortion, Identity and Loss" (essay 2, 1984). Even the earliest abortion is not, he says, morally negligible: the fetus has a certain right to our consideration because, as a human being in the making, it can suffer the loss of the human life that *it* might have had. There is, however, another right – "the right of respect" – which becomes more compelling as the fetus comes closer to full human status. Quinn thus hopes to do justice to both our intuition that even the earliest abortion *matters* and the thought that the objection to abortion becomes stronger as the fetus develops.

In "The Right to Threaten and the Right to Punish" (essay 3, 1985) Quinn sees the problem from the beginning as the problem of the *right* we have actually to carry out punishments even in the absence of utilitarian justification. In this highly idiosyncratic paper Quinn argues that it is the right to threaten punishment that justifies the right to carry it out, rather than, as has been supposed, the other way around. A reply to a critic of this theory ("Reply to Brook," 1988) is printed here as essay 4.

Thus Quinn challenges consequentialism in a number of his papers. But it seems to have been even more important to him, as time went on, to criticize, and find an alternative to, the subjectiv-

1 This article was discussed by J. Boyle ("Who is Entitled to Double Effect?") and by Frances M. Kamm ("The Doctrine of Double Effect: Reflections on Theoretical and Practical Issues") in a special issue of *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 16: 1991. Quinn's reply to Boyle and Kamm is reprinted as essay 9.

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ism of such moral philosophers as C. L. Stevenson, R. M. Hare, John Mackie, and Bernard Williams. In "Moral and Other Realisms" (essay 1, 1978) he goes no further than to argue the inadequacy of certain arguments to settle the question of objectivity one way or the other. But in his final essays, "Rationality and the Human Good" and "Putting Rationality in its Place" (essays 11 and 12, 1992 and forthcoming, June 1993), he strikes at the root of emotivism and prescriptivism by challenging the neo-Humean theory of rationality on which contemporary subjectivism is so largely based. It has been, and still is, the boast of emotivists, prescriptivists, and their heirs, that they alone can do justice to the *practical* aspect of morality: that only if moral language is seen as expressing feelings, attitudes, or commitments, can its essentially reason-giving aspect be understood. Quinn argues that on the contrary the mere presence of a feeling, attitude, or prior decision cannot in itself give reason for any action, so that these "expressivist" theories are far from being able themselves to give an account of the rationality of acting morally. Moreover the problem of the rationality of moral judgment arises for philosophers such as Richard Hare, John Mackie, and Bernard Williams precisely because they have taken over a broadly Humean theory of practical rationality, in which an independent, neutral Reason acts to coordinate ultimately uncriticizable motivations. Quinn argues (in "Rationality and the Human Good") that a so-called virtue of practical rationality that found itself in such a complaisant position even in the face of shameful desires would have little claim to be the supreme human excellence. There is, he says "something in the moral indifference of neo-Humean rationality that stops it from shining forth in this role," and he himself outlines a neo-Aristotelean view of rationality which gives it a voice in the determination of human goodness extending even to the judgment of our most ultimate ends.

In these final articles Quinn has, therefore, mounted a strong attack on the Humean roots of contemporary moral subjectivism. He had earlier cleared the path by paying critical attention to a new argument against objectivism, originated by Gilbert Harman and also used by Bernard Williams, to the effect that the existence "out there in the world" of objective properties of actions corresponding to our judgments about what we ought morally to do, was suspect, because it could play no part in explaining the fact that we make these judgments. Quinn gives reasons for rejecting this "explana-

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tory requirement," as also for denying the significance placed by Williams in a distinction between "thick" and "thin" moral concepts.

These critical essays, "Truth and Explanation in Ethics" (essay 5, 1985), and "Reflections and the Loss of Moral Knowledge: Williams on Objectivity" (essay 6, 1986) demand a reply. Together, the positive and the critical pieces add up to a contribution to moral philosophy that it will be impossible to ignore. Quinn's work should do much to weaken the widespread prejudice in favor of a Humean theory of practical rationality, and so to call in question contemporary subjectivist theories of moral judgment, which cannot do without its support.

Philippa Foot
April 1992

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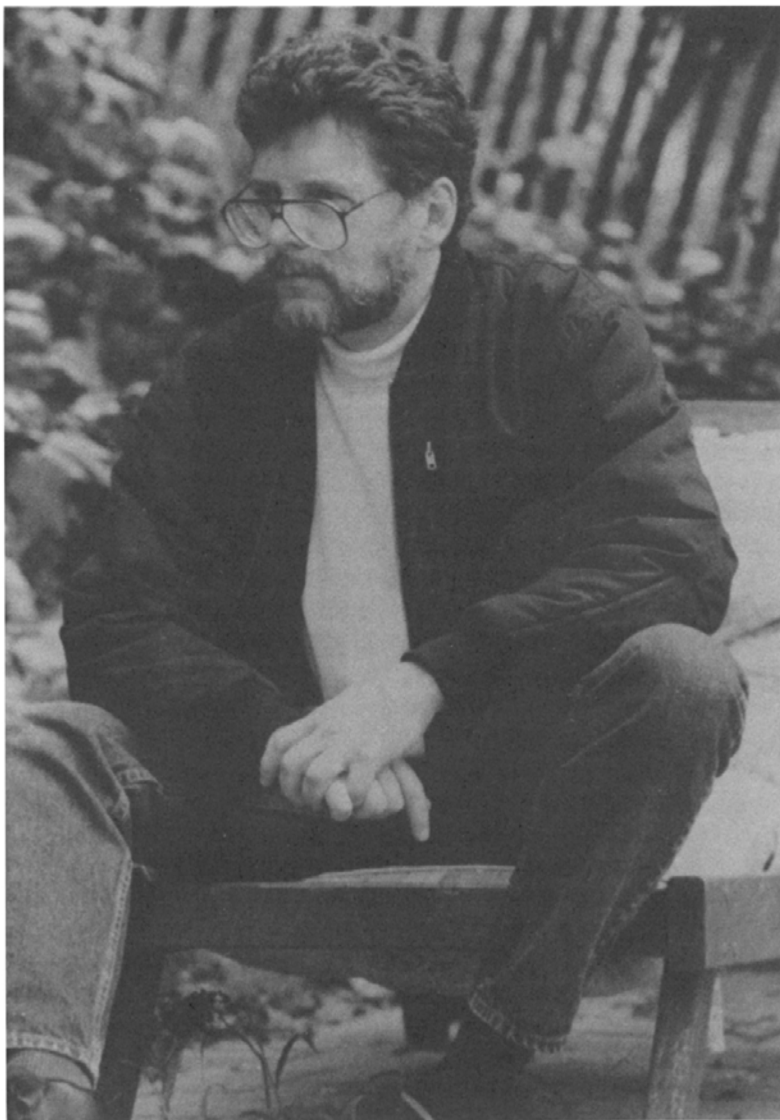

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