

The Authority of Reason

The Authority of Reason argues against much contemporary orthodoxy in philosophy and the social sciences by showing why objectivity in the domain of ethics is really no different from the objectivity of scientific knowledge.

Many philosophers and social scientists have challenged the idea that we act for objectively authoritative reasons. They have argued that there is no place for such objectively authoritative reasons in a scientific account of the world. For them, the only acceptable reasons are those that operate through a person's contingent desires and preferences.

Jean Hampton takes up the challenge by undermining two central assumptions of this contemporary orthodoxy – that one can understand instrumental reasons without appeal to objective authority, and that the adoption of the scientific worldview requires no such appeal. Rejection of these assumptions opens the way for a post-naturalist theory of the objective authority of reasons. In *The Authority of Reason*, Hampton examines moral realism, the general nature of reason and norms, internalism and externalism, instrumental reasoning, and the expected utility model of practical reasoning.

Jean Hampton's untimely death in 1996 prevented her from completing two of the chapters, which have been left in the form of sketches. The work has been edited for publication by Richard Healey. Even in this slightly incomplete form, the book will prove to be a seminal work in the theory of rationality and will be read by a broad swath of philosophers and social scientists.

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Edited by Richard Healey



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To Andrew

O star, (the fairest one in sight),
We grant you loftiness, the right
to some obscurity of cloud –
it will not do to say of night,
Since dark is what brings out your light.
Some mystery becomes the proud.
But to be wholly taciturn
In reserve is not allowed.
Say something to us we can learn
By heart and when alone repeat.
Say something! And it says, "I burn."
But say with what degree of heat.
Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.
Use language we can comprehend.
Tell us what elements you blend.
It gives us strangely little aid,
But does tell something in the end.
And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here.
It asks of us a certain height,
So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on, and be staid.

– Robert Frost, "Choose Something Like A Star",
from *Steeple Bush* (1947)

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Editor's Preface

Jean Hampton died on April 2, 1996, three days after going into a coma induced by a massive brain hemorrhage. The main intellectual project she was actively engaged on just before her death was the completion and revision of a draft of a book with the working title *A Theory of Reasons*. The draft she was working from contained nine chapters and a preface, introduction, and preliminary material. She had significantly revised the first three chapters in the weeks prior to her unexpected and premature death, which prevented her from completing her work on the rest of the manuscript.

Jean thought of this as her most important work, and had asked me to ensure its publication in the event she was unable to do so herself. With the encouragement of Terry Moore of Cambridge University Press, I have undertaken to honor her request. The book is closely based on computer files of the most recent versions of the preface, introduction, and preliminary material, and nine chapters of *A Theory of Reasons* as they were left at Jean's death.

The material has been lightly edited to remove obvious typographical and other minor errors. More substantial editorial interventions are noted explicitly, mainly in footnotes and appendices – the words of the editor in the text are enclosed in brackets. When difficult editorial decisions arose, I have tried to make them in such a way as to preserve the original material even when it was repetitious or lacking in continuity. Additions and modifications were made solely to make the book as independently intelligible as possible. At the head of each chapter is the date of the author's last revision of the computer file containing that chapter. These dates make it clear that while the material up to Chapter 3 was revised just before Jean's death, the rest of the chapters had not been revised since up to a year earlier.

Editor's Preface

Had Jean lived, she would certainly have extensively revised the material in Chapters 4 through 9, including completing Chapters 6 and 9, which are here merely outlined. Since it was her custom to go through several drafts before publishing any work, I consider it very likely that even the revision she was working on when she died would not have resulted in the final draft of the manuscript. Jean compared her creative philosophical work to the art of sculpture. Just as the sculptor strives to reveal what he or she sees already present at least in its rough outlines in the unworked clay, so too the philosopher first sees the truth, if only in broadest outline, and then seeks to reveal it in detail by analysis and the construction of arguments. This is a process that has no natural termination. In the case of this book, it is a process that was far from complete at the time of its author's death.

As Jean says in her preface, this work is intended to stimulate its readers to rethink its questions for themselves rather than to present them with a definitive resolution. Especially in light of its unfinished state, such rethinking must start from a sympathetic reading and refashioning of the arguments it contains. Jean herself often used to say that to convince a philosophical opponent, it is not sufficient to refute his or her arguments as these are presented. To carry conviction, one must first understand and develop these arguments into their strongest form, and only then show why even this improved form of argument fails to justify the intended conclusion. She would certainly have hoped and expected that those critical of the ideas presented here, as well as her more sympathetic readers, would strive to provide those ideas with the best possible justification before attempting to evaluate their worth.

A number of people joined me in the task of editing the manuscript. Ron Milo and Christopher Morris carefully read lightly edited drafts of the entire manuscript and made many detailed suggestions about additional editing, most of which I followed. I have David Silver to thank for compiling the bibliography and for detailed discussions on the structure of arguments in Chapter 8 against the Resolution Strategy, and Cindy Holder for compiling the index.

Preface and Acknowledgments

[computer file 2/10/96]

Israel Scheffler once told me that every time he wrote a book, he would swear it would be his last. Any author knows the feeling – books take too long to write, the arguments and the prose never seem good enough, and when one is all done, the enormity of all that is still wrong with the final product hits home. Still, authors are ever hopeful that their contributions will be of *some* use, and I am no exception. I have aimed to write a book that does not so much attempt to persuade, as to dissuade – I wish to shake readers loose from the grip of a conception of the world that threatens our ability to act both rationally and reasonably.

In the process of constructing a work that attempts to rattle those who read it, I have been the recipient of much help, often from people who are quite opposed to this project. I am very grateful for their generous support and probing criticisms. In particular, I would like to thank Julia Annas, John Broome, Tom Christiano, David Copp, Ron Milo, Ken O'Day, John Pollock, Joseph Raz, John Roemer, Robert Sugden, and Bruno Verbeek. I also owe much to the graduate students attending my seminars at the University of California at Davis and the University of Arizona, in which portions of this book were presented. Their persistence in demanding more clarity and better arguments was invaluable in revising the final product. Finally, I am indebted to the audiences who heard portions of this book presented at lectures, conferences, and seminars at Oxford University, Texas Tech University, the University of Western Illinois, Yale Law School, Chicago Law School, CREA and the École Polytechnique (Paris), The European University Institute in Florence, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Notre Dame, Calvin College, Dalhousie University, Pomona College, the University of Sussex, and the University of East Anglia. Special thanks goes to the

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Thanks also goes to the National Endowment for the Humanities, to the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Pew Charitable Trusts for providing me with fellowship support that has given me the time I needed to write and finish the book. I am particularly grateful to the Pew Foundation for granting me a three-year Pew Evangelical Scholarship, by way of supporting the work of someone who is committed to being a Christian analytic philosopher. I hope that this book will seem to them to have been a good investment.

In February and March 1996 I was a research fellow at CREA (Centre de Recherche en Epistemologie Appliquée) of the École Polytechnique. I am very grateful for the marvelous research environment, and would like to particularly thank Pasquale Pasquino and Jean-Pierre Dupuy. I am also grateful to the Social Philosophy and Policy Center at Bowling Green State University for providing me with a warm and supportive research environment during the summer of 1993.

I am grateful to my husband Richard Healey for many things, including the tactful way in which he phrased his criticisms of portions of this book and for getting me up in the morning and making my tea. I am also grateful to my son Andrew Hampton-Healey for all his questions about my project. This book is dedicated to him and honors his thoughtful pursuit of the truth, of which his parents are very proud.