

Introduction
Practical reason, moral justification, and
the grounds of value

Reasons for action, for belief, and for desire are central in human existence. We regularly stake our future on our reasons. For one or another reason, we promise resources and time, trust other people, buy and sell property. Reasons can be good or bad, conclusive or inconclusive, premeditated or spontaneous. They may arise from inference, but they may also produce it. They may or may not be moral in kind; and when they are moral, they may or may not be based on intuition and may or may not be grounded in some conception of moral rights. Reasons are both central in the constitution of virtue and essential in the motivation of action that expresses virtue. In our political activities, reasons play a special role. How they should figure in the conduct of conscientious citizens, and whether religiously based reasons are on a par with secular reasons is much debated. This is a central question for understanding civic virtue, and that in turn is important for the theory of liberal democracy.

This book is about reasons in all the connections just indicated, and it approaches the topic of reasons with an eye to structure, content, and grounds. The place of reasons in ethics is often directly in view, and the book bears on the nature and scope of moral obligation as well as on the nature and basis of intrinsic value. Related to all these topics is the question of how we can know what reasons we have and what acts are rational on the basis of them. What follows is an indication of the focus of the individual chapters.

I Reasons for action

Reasoning is characteristic of human beings. But what is it? Is it essential for rational action? How is it related to reasons? And how, in turn, are reasons related to value? The essays in Part I provide accounts of all four of these notions and say much about their interconnections. The final chapter in this part, on practical reason and moral obligation, brings the resources of

the earlier essays to bear on the perennial question of whether it is rational to be moral.

Reasons and reasoning. In Chapter 1, “Reasons, practical reason, and practical reasoning,” five kinds of practical reasons are distinguished and interconnected. These include *normative reasons*, such as reasons there are to keep one’s promises; *possessed reasons*, such as *my* reasons to help a student; and *explanatory reasons*, such as the reason for which I in fact do help a student. A natural question about reasons is how they are related to reasoning, and I show why their role in human action does not depend on any process of reasoning in which they figure. Showing why this is so breaks the stereotype of rationality as essentially tied to *reasoning*. The concepts of reasons as supporting elements, of practical reason as a capacity, and of practical reasoning as a process, are all central in the theory of action, and this essay provides a brief account of each. It characterizes practical reason both as a capacity whose exercise is largely constituted by a kind of responsiveness to reasons and as governed by certain normative principles; and it describes practical reasoning as a kind of mental process in which reasons figure as premises and, from those premises, a practical conclusion is drawn. Much of the chapter undertakes three related tasks: to describe the main kinds of practical reasoning, to identify criteria for their assessment, and to formulate some important substantive principles of practical reason. On the theory presented, although any (non-basic) intentional act can be grounded in practical reasoning, the same acts can be performed for the relevant reason(s) *without* being so grounded, and in either case their rationality depends on adequate support by the reason(s) and not on the process by which the reasons lead to their performance. One kind of reason is commonly thought to be captured by Kantian hypothetical imperatives, and the final sections explore what constitutes a hypothetical imperative. A major conclusion is that in the domain of practical reason, if there are no categorical imperatives, there are no hypothetical imperatives either.

The relation between reasons and values. It is natural to think that if there is anything genuinely good in itself, there is reason to realize or in some way honor it. Chapter 2, “Intrinsic value and reasons for action,” provides a theory of what kinds of things are intrinsically good (and intrinsically bad) and it clarifies how these things figure in reasons for action. The chapter begins with a brief account of Moore’s theory of intrinsic value, assesses some of its central elements, and proceeds to develop a quite different theory. The theory incorporates distinctions Moore did not draw, including the distinction between intrinsic and inherent value; it proposes a revised

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principle of organic unities (the kind illustrated by the combination of valuable elements in a fine painting); and it avoids commitment to Moore's non-naturalism in metaethics and his consequentialist account of moral obligation. In developing the theory, I consider the question of whether positing intrinsic value precludes acceptance of the idea that to be good is to be a good thing of a relevant *kind*. I also provide an interpretation of the point that some intrinsic goods are (as Kant maintained) not good without qualification. The concluding sections take up the ontology and epistemology of value and the status of normative reasons for action. (It should be noted that a commentary followed this chapter in its initial appearance and that my detailed reply, "Intrinsic Value, Inherent Value, and Experience: A Reply to Stephen Barker" – which was meant to appear in that same issue – appeared in the next issue of the *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 41, 3, 2003, 323–7.)

The grounding of practical reasons. Chapter 3, "The grounds and structure of reasons for action," develops the view provided in Chapters 1 and 2 by articulating a more detailed account of the nature of reasons for action and also of their grounds. Here the relation between reasons and facts is a central concern, and I argue against the *factivity view* of reasons held by Derek Parfit and others, on which only facts are reasons. Experiences of certain kinds are represented as grounding reasons for action, both causally and normatively. The essay also develops parallels between practical and theoretical reasons. Practical reasons are, however, seen to differ from theoretical reasons in the kind of content they have. This difference is shown to be connected with the different explanatory and normative roles of the practical attitudes, such as intention and desire, and the theoretical ones, such as belief and judgment. The theory of reasons defended here also provides an account of the relation between practical reasons and facts. It describes a kind of dependence of practical reason on theoretical reason, but it affirms their mutual irreducibility and the indispensability of both in the theory of rational action.

Reason and morality. The final chapter in Part I, "Practical reason and the status of moral obligation," considers the question of whether, as so often seems plausible, self-interest is the ultimate source and basis of our reasons for action, hence constitutes the foundation of practical reason and an obstacle to the view that, in broad terms, morality is rational in its own right. Here, drawing on the theory of value articulated in Chapter 2, I distinguish between the roles of the *impersonal* and the *non-personal* in grounding reasons. I also consider the question of how moral reasons are related to practical reasons in general. For instance, if, as I argue, moral

reasons can outweigh reasons of self-interest, are moral reasons supreme? This question is best understood in terms of two other dimensions in which we can compare moral reasons with those of self-interest. One is *priority*, which is a matter of one kind of reason's having greater *normative force* than another kind. Priority implies preferability where reasons conflict. The other – not generally noted in the literature of ethics – is *paramountcy*. This is a matter of one kind of reason's being a *better basis of action* than another kind. Paramountcy implies preferability where reasons align. This superiority relation might be said to hold for moral reasons as opposed to self-interested ones even if the former should be normatively of equal strength. Moral obligation, for instance, seems a better reason on which to keep a promise than self-interest even when the latter is aligned with the former in favoring the same action.

II Intuition, obligation, and virtue

Intuitionism is now widely recognized as a major kind of ethical theory. Much of my work in the past two decades has been devoted to developing an intuitionist ethics that avoids the major weaknesses of earlier intuitionist views and, like virtue ethics, Kantian ethics, and utilitarianism, is a plausible contender for a leading position in contemporary moral theory. The version of intuitionism I propose is intended to approach this status, and Part II introduces it and shows how it accommodates major elements of all three of the other leading kinds of ethical theory. Here is a sketch of the four chapters.

The new intuitionism. The opening essay, Chapter 5 – “Intuitions, intuitionism, and moral judgment” – clarifies a notion important for all the chapters and indeed, in my view, for philosophical inquiry in general: the nature of intuition. Here five cases are considered and interconnected: *cognitive intuitions* – intuitions that *p* (some proposition); *intuitiveness* – *p*'s appearing intuitive, evoking what might be called the sense of non-inferential credibility; *propositional intuitions* – propositions taken to be intuitively known; *objectual intuitions*, roughly direct apprehensions of properties, concepts, or relations; and “*facultative*” *intuition* – a kind of apprehensional capacity by which we know what we intuitively do know. Once the notion of intuition is clarified, intuitionism as I have developed it – now often called “the new intuitionism” – is introduced. This position is more moderate than Ross's and different in important ways. The best elements in his view are preserved, but there are advances in (among other things) the epistemology of self-evidence, the conception of non-inferential

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justification, and the account of how to determine overall obligation given conflicting *prima facie* obligations.

Kantian elements in intuitionism. There is little doubt that Kant relied on intuition in his moral theory. Taking this reliance in relation to my conception of self-evidence, I have integrated major elements in Kant with the new intuitionism outlined in the previous chapter. Chapter 6, “Kantian intuitionism as a framework for the justification of moral judgments,” briefly presents my integration of a revised, expanded Rossian intuitionism with an account of Kant’s Humanity Formula – though I do not claim it is the account Kant would give. I first clarify Rossian intuitionism and, especially, the mistaken notion of self-evidence it employs. My account of self-evidence accommodates Ross’s principles of obligation but rejects his conception – shared with Prichard and Moore, among others – of the self-evident as unprovable. The account also explains how the self-evident can fail to be obvious and indeed need not be believed by everyone who comprehendingly considers it. With this much accomplished, the essay meets some recent objections to Kantian intuitionism as I presented it in *The Good in the Right* (2004), and earlier in *Mind* (2001). With the results of this discussion in view, the chapter advances that theory by distinguishing two kinds of moral questions – thick and thin questions – that the theory leads us to stress. Their importance for moral decision is illustrated, and the concluding section formulates a number of principles that are supported by Kantian intuitionism and can aid practical wisdom in making moral judgments in difficult cases of conflicting *prima facie* moral obligation. In illustrating these principles, I show how the Humanity Formula supports intuitive moral principles even while those principles provide clarity to that very formula. A tree may receive nourishment from roots it does not depend on. This nourishment may affect both its foliage and fruits, but these may each have value independent of that support and may also strengthen the roots.

Virtue-theoretical elements in the new intuitionism. Kant is famous for the distinction between acting *from* duty and acting merely in conformity with it, and this distinction is closely paralleled in virtue ethics and likely anticipated in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Chapter 7, “Moral virtue and reasons for action,” clarifies the parallel distinction in virtue theory. It clarifies the way in which actions are performed *from* virtue and explores the extent to which we may have control of how our actions are grounded. Given our having two or more reasons for doing something, as we often do, say where self-interest is aligned with obligation, can we bring it about at will that we act, as would a virtuous person in our position, *for* the

moral reason? This seems unlikely. It may still be possible, however, that we have considerable *indirect* control of why we act in such cases. Here and in other cases, there is much we can do to sustain, enhance, and perhaps even develop virtues of character.

Virtue ethics and intuitionist pluralism. In the light of the conception of virtue ethics provided by Chapter 8, “Virtue ethics in theory and practice” (appearing here for the first time in English) considers mainly the structure of moral virtue and, in that light, the normative side of virtue ethics. Moral virtue is characterized in contrast with other kinds, and the role of appeals to virtue in normative ethics is clarified. Here virtue ethics is seen as compatible with reliance on certain rules in practical ethics; its tension with intuitionistic rule ethics is not at the level of endorsements of particular types of action, nor of conditions for the morally creditworthy motivation of action, but only at the level of theoretical explanation of the *grounds* of morally required deeds. This makes possible an extensive use of virtue notions in intuitionist ethics and a high degree of harmony between the new intuitionism and virtue ethics in the practical domain of moral education and applied ethics.

III Religion, politics, and the obligations of citizenship

Drawing on a number of ideas that govern the theory of reasons, obligations, and values framed in Parts I and II, Part III explores how my overall theory of practical reason and, more particularly, my ethical intuitionism, bear on political philosophy. Here I have been highly selective in choosing representative papers. Its area of application is mainly religion in relation to political activity by both governments and citizens. This is an important area and much debated at present, but I should say here that by contrast with the rather comprehensive ethical theory presented in the first two parts, Part III, though it amply reflects that theory, applies mainly to just one major segment of civic and political life.

Obligation, good character, and rights. Given the importance of rights in political philosophy, Chapter 9, “Wrongs within rights,” is an appropriate opening essay in this part. I argue that although many of our major obligations are *rights-based* – such that non-fulfillment of the obligations entails violating someone’s rights – not all of our obligations are rights-based. Consider the obligations of beneficence. There are good deeds we morally ought to do that we nonetheless have a right not to do. For even the moderately prosperous, these include charitable donations. And suppose I want to gamble but know that I might waste funds I would otherwise use for

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morally desirable purposes. I have a right to use more of my resources than I should and may be morally criticizable for doing so. These are examples of wrongs within rights. This chapter defends this position and argues that not all our obligations are rights-based, in the sense that anyone has a right to our fulfilling them. Even rectitude, which some might think is achievable just by living within our rights and respecting the rights of others, is not *fully* achievable thereby; and virtuous moral character certainly requires more. The point is not that the notion of a right is dispensable in ethics, though an adequate set of moral principles may perhaps cover the normative ground indicated by rights – a matter discussed in some detail in the essay. Rather, whatever our principles, if they are to be morally comprehensive, they must call for more than is required by any plausible rights-based ethics.

Reasons and virtues in civic and political life. Given what Chapter 9 argues concerning rights, it should be no surprise that a political philosophy, like normative ethics generally, must contain principles that articulate not only rights-based obligations but also obligations that are more like those of beneficence. These are a kind crucial for civic virtue but perhaps not for minimally tolerable citizenship. Chapter 10, “Religion and the politics of science: can evolutionary biology be religiously neutral?” provides both kinds of principle: first, rights-based principles of the institutional kind that call for respecting religious liberty, to which there is clearly a right; and second, principles addressed to individual citizens. Among these is a principle positing a *prima facie* obligation (not based on others’ rights) to have adequate secular reasons (‘natural reasons’, in an older terminology) for support of laws and public policies that would restrict the liberty of citizens. To bring these institutional principles to bear on a practical problem, I consider teaching of evolution in public schools. Does doing this violate the religious liberty of parents who do not want it? Is requiring the teaching of evolutionary theory a failure of governmental neutrality toward religion? These questions are treated in detail, and the chapter also proposes some ways in which evolution may best be taught with both governmental responsibility and religious liberty in view.

Transnational ethics and the moral status of patriotism. The final chapter, “Nationalism, patriotism, and cosmopolitanism in an age of globalization,” widens the scope of Part III and, implicitly, the ethical position of the book. It considers the matter of our obligations to our fellow citizens in relation to our moral obligations regarding persons in general – at least those in the world as we know it. With this relation in view, the paper addresses a major issue in political philosophy: the extent to which some version of

nationalism or, by contrast, of cosmopolitanism, is morally justified. Both may be understood as views on the status and responsibilities of nation states, but the terms may also designate attitudes appropriate to those positions. One problem in political philosophy is to distinguish and appraise various forms of nationalism and cosmopolitanism; a related problem is how to understand the relation of patriotism to each. Nationalists may tend to be patriots, but need not be; patriots may tend to be nationalists, but need not be. Like nationalism, patriotism may also be considered in propositional forms or in related attitudinal forms. But, unlike nationalism and cosmopolitanism, patriotism can exist in the form of an emotion: roughly, love of one's country. This chapter characterizes nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and patriotism in both propositional and attitudinal forms and argues for a conception of patriotism on which it is both distinct from nationalism and compatible with certain kinds of cosmopolitanism. The essay also suggests how, in appropriately moderate forms, nationalism and cosmopolitanism are defensible, even if cosmopolitanism more clearly conforms with the moral requirements of beneficence.

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Every chapter of this book provides a positive view of its topic, but each raises certain questions it does not answer and prepares the way for further inquiry into its subjects. My aim in the book as a whole is to provide much of what is needed in the foundations of a comprehensive ethical theory. Much can be built on what is provided here, but there is also much to be done. Let me conclude with a brief indication of what is needed to extend the work accomplished so far by these essays.

Part I proposes a theory of reasons that grounds them in experience. I have so far only sketched the phenomenology of such experiences. How should we account in detail for the phenomenology of the kinds of rewarding, value-grounding experiences in question? I have also proposed a theory of value that countenances *non*-experiential elements – those having inherent value – as sources of non-instrumental reasons for action. What exactly is the range of connections between things with inherent value, including persons, and intrinsic value as the more basic kind? The final chapter in Part I raises the question of the relation between reason and morality. The theory developed there provides a framework for distinguishing kinds and strengths of reasons for being moral, but it does not show the application of that framework to all of the ten dimensions of moral obligation that, in Part II, are recognized in the categories represented by Rossian obligations. That application is well worth pursuing in detail. My hope is that doing so will confirm the plausibility of the framework I have provided.

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Part II introduces the ‘new intuitionism’, as my intuitionist view has been called, and shows how the view can be integrated with what I take to be a plausible interpretation of Kant’s Humanity Formula, but the essay on Kantian intuitionism leaves a great deal to be said regarding just what it is to treat people as ends and to avoid treating them merely as means. This is under study by students of Kant but, quite apart from his use of the two notions, their scope is of major interest to moral philosophy and should be examined in detail (a project I am carrying out in my *Means, Ends, and Persons*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press in 2015). The problem of how to resolve conflicts of prima facie obligations is also addressed by my intuitionist view, but the partial answer provided does not indicate the bearing of two resources that should help with the problem. One – perception of moral phenomena (the subject of my *Moral Perception*, 2013) – is only implicitly treated in the book, but perception as a cognitive capacity has considerable power in determining the overall normative significance of many complex patterns we encounter in dealing with concrete moral problems. The other is the bearing of virtues of character on the resolution problem. In offering a conception of virtue and of action from it, I have gone partway in this direction, but further work is needed to show in detail how the exercise of virtue can lead to resolution of conflicts of obligation. Here my sense has been that the appeal of virtue ethicists to practical wisdom in such matters is quite consonant with the appeal to intuition guided by such standards as the Humanity Formula. Whether this is so is a good question for future research.

Part III extends to the realm of political philosophy the intuitionist, qualifiedly Kantian framework offered in Chapters 1 through 8. In that realm, appeals to rights are common. It is also common (and reasonable) to judge governments and indeed political systems by how well they protect the rights of citizens. I have argued that rights do not exhaust oughts; but the question of how far rights go remains. A related question suggested by at least two of the essays in Part III is this: what differentiates rights to something – say, religious liberty – and a principle calling for its protection? In this connection, I have defended both a right to free exercise of religion and a principle expressing a governmental obligation of religious neutrality, arguing that neutrality does not preclude requiring, in public education, certain curricula that religious people may understandably consider inappropriate for their children. A question remaining here is how neutrality is to be characterized in a way that is both morally defensible and adequate to protecting the rights of all parties concerned. I have gone some distance in that project, but its completion requires further work. The question of

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the basis, scope, and strength of our moral obligations arises again in the final chapter. If the basis of moral obligation lies, as I believe, in universal elements, can nationalism be squared with a sound moral appraisal of the human condition and justice to all people? This is yet another question on which I hope to have contributed important materials for a resolution but have left room for – indeed invited – further reflection.