
One and the Same Reason

by

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My dissertation is about the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. I argue that these two kinds of reason are unified in important respects. In Chapter One I argue that there is a single, fundamental kind of reasoning (roughly, unrestrained self-reflection) and that theoretical and practical reason ought to be understood as instances of this more fundamental kind of reasoning, distinguished only by their subject matter. I then argue that two formulations of Kant's Categorical Imperative jointly codify the activity of this basic reasoning. Therefore, the Categorical Imperative is, in this sense, the supreme principle of reason. In Chapter Two I show how the very abstract norms formulated in Chapter One can be sharpened if we connect them to the conditions of human agency. I argue that the demands of being an agent require us to submit to a procedure of negotiation and legislation with other agents that is similar to the contractualism of Hobbes and Rawls. The difference between my view and theirs is that my contractualism, because it is tied to our agency, issues in categorical requirements. In Chapter Three I develop a theory of normative concepts that satisfies two demands that have appeared incompatible: the demand that our normative concepts be intimately connected to human nature and the demand that normative items be things we aspire to, and thus things that are relevantly *beyond* us and our activities. I show how we can satisfy both of these desiderata through an open-ended constructivism that understands normative items as transcendent ideals. In Chapter Four I argue that a robust, philosophically serviceable distinction between theoretical judgments about the world and practical judgments about what one ought to do cannot be sustained because these two kinds of judgments are inextricably entangled. They are entangled because we must employ both kinds of judgment to fully explain actions. This fact entails that practical and theoretical judgments occupy a single holistic theory.

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If pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to *a priori* principles; it is then clear that, even if from the first perspective its capacity does not extend to establishing certain propositions affirmatively, although they do not contradict it, as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason it must accept them. — Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*

Carnap has maintained that this is a question not of matters of fact but of choosing a convenient language form, a convenient conceptual scheme or framework for science. With this I agree, but only on the proviso that the same be conceded regarding scientific hypotheses generally. Carnap has recognized that he is able to preserve a double standard for ontological questions and scientific hypotheses only by assuming an absolute distinction between the analytic and the synthetic; and I need not say again that this is a distinction which I reject. The issue over there being classes seems more a question of convenient conceptual scheme; the issue over there being centaurs, or brick houses on Elm Street, seems more a question of fact. But I have been urging that this difference is only one of degree, and that it turns upon our vaguely pragmatic inclination to adjust one strand of the fabric of science rather than another in accommodating some particular recalcitrant experience. — Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”

The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. — Emerson, “The American Scholar”

The universe is God itself, the universal outpouring of its soul. — Chrysippus

By the way, would you convey my compliments to the purist who reads your proofs and tell him or her that I write in a sort of broken-down patois which is something like the way a Swiss-waiter talks, and that when I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it will remain split, and when I interrupt the velvety smoothness of my more or less literate syntax with a few sudden words of barroom vernacular, this is done with the eyes wide open and the mind relaxed and attentive. The method may not be perfect, but it is all I have. — Chandler