

Preface

I do not remember when I first came to think of rationalism as an important line of thought in philosophy. From my philosophical beginnings, I did find the rationalists more interesting than the empiricists. Descartes and Kant, in particular, struck me as striving in attractive ways for philosophical understanding. By contrast, Locke and Hume seemed more oriented toward debunking overreaches in philosophy. I realized that both approaches have their place. But I thought that the first approach held out the better prospect of depth and discovery in philosophy. The idea that one could gain knowledge and insight purely through reasoning or understanding seemed one that should not be given up without very powerful reason to do so. Descartes and Kant did overreach. They also discovered more. They did so, partly, by finding limited ways in which reasoning and understanding could be trusted to yield insight and cognition.

In my early education in philosophy, I was faced with a near taboo against any sort of rationalism. The taboo was almost as strong as the one against questioning materialism. (See the conclusion of ‘Modest Dualism’.) Although logical positivism had fallen, a dominant idea at the time was that philosophers should transform themselves either into commentators on empirical science or, taking Wittgenstein as model, into therapists whose aim was to show philosophical questions to be confused or pointless. I recognized the importance of empirical science as a topic and resource for philosophy. I was never convinced by the reductionistic impulses that drove the dominant idea. Fortunately, the taboo no longer holds sway.

I learned from writings consecrated by the taboo, however. In particular, I learned from Quine and Putnam’s sophisticated empiricism (or in the case of Putnam, near empiricism—he held out, as he thought bravely, for the apriority of the principle of non-contradiction). Their work taught me how empirical warrant can be unconsciously embedded in what we take for granted, in what we may seem to know by intuition or reflection alone. Their work also showed the dependence of many definitions and meaning explications on empirically supported background beliefs. I think that I began to take in how limited and hedged a fruitful rationalism would have to be, at least beyond its most obvious applications to pure logic and pure mathematics.

What kept me from being convinced by the prevailing empiricism, apart from a natural aversion to ideology, was its patently inadequate account of logic and

mathematics, its denial or failure to reflect on cognition in ordinary value judgments, and its failure to give a convincing account of some aspects of philosophy itself.

Quine had decisively defeated the positivists' attempts to show logic and mathematics to be empty of substantive cognition. Yet Quine's and others' efforts to show that logic and mathematics are justified purely through their role in natural science seemed to me to conflate pure logic and mathematics with applied logic and mathematics. Or else, they failed, without good reason, to take epistemic practice in these disciplines as the primary ground for accounts of the disciplines' epistemology. I later came to take Frege's sarcastic remark about Mill in *Foundations of Arithmetic* as a pithy summation of the mistake: 'It might well be supposed that numerical formulae would be synthetic or analytic, a posteriori or a priori, according as the general laws on which their proofs depend are so. John Stuart Mill, however, is of the opposite opinion.'

Regarding ordinary value judgments, I thought it clear that such judgments as that slavery is wrong or torturing children for the fun of it is wrong are cognitively sound and warranted not by sense experience, but by understanding what right and wrong are. Attempts to fit such judgments into empiricist molds seemed, and seem, hopeless.

Regarding philosophy itself, my thinking is harder to chart in retrospect. The terrain is much more complex. I mention two landmarks. I came to be impressed by Frege's example in philosophy, through teaching his work in my early years at UCLA. Some of his insights into mathematics, logic, and language—for example, his anti-Millian point, his account of knowledge of axioms, his distinction between negation and denial, his distinction between sense and reference—seemed to owe nothing to empirical sources for their warrant. I also remember, perhaps two years past graduate school, asking Quine—during a long, late-night car trip in New England—whether he thought that his principle of charity is empirically grounded. After a full minute of silence, he replied with no elaboration, 'Perhaps it's not'. I do not know how he took the exchange. I do know that he sometimes did not bother to defend orally views that he nevertheless firmly held. But to me, at that formative time, it seemed that the key witness had failed to support the defense.

These essays reflect attempts to understand certain types of cognition at least some of whose aspects seem to be warranted apriori. The attempts center mostly on issues that are orthogonal to the more standard epistemological issues regarding mathematics, logic, and ethics. I discuss self-knowledge, interlocution, certain types of inference in reasoning, and reflection. I think that discussing these different, but still central, issues might enrich our sense of the roles of reasoning and understanding in cognition.

As I note in the Introduction, my interest in these areas of cognition is fundamentally motivated by the idea that each area helps bring out underlying psychological capacities that are, very likely, distinctive to human beings. A major theme in the essays is to try to understand cognitive capacities that

constitutively make selves—and persons—the beings that they are. I think that epistemology should be pursued, more often than it actually is, as a close partner to philosophy of mind and to psychology. One cannot understand epistemic norms except as norms for using *well* certain psychological capacities that yield cognition, knowledge, science, or rational belief. The norms are best understood in conjunction with understanding psychological capacities to meet them—the very capacities for which the norms are standards for good use.

Through my work on anti-individualism and especially on perception, I have come to appreciate the animal underpinnings of the central rational capacities—understanding and reason. This appreciation has led to qualifications of some of my earlier rationalist claims—for example, the claim that one can know something from interlocution, or from a computer readout, purely apriori. (See ‘Post-script: “Content Preservation”’.) I, too, overreached. Moreover, I have what I regard as a new appreciation of how inference itself can support a conclusion without doing so through reason or understanding. (See ‘Epistemic Warrant: Humans and Computers’.)

I remain impressed by the warranting power of understanding and reasoning, and by their substantial warranting roles in the types of cognition discussed in these essays. I remain convinced that these capacities are among those that make human beings special—not only distinctive among terrestrial animals, but worthy of being specially valued and respected. The capacities to understand and to reason—especially to reason in a reflective, self-critical way—underlie science. I believe that these capacities are constitutive aspects of morality (see ‘Self and Constitutive Norms’), which Kant rightly took in *Critique of Practical Reason* to be an object of wonder and awe. Science and morality are two of the things in which human beings can rightly take most pride.

Many vivid memories attend the development of these essays. The basic ideas of the first essay on self-knowledge, ‘Individualism and Self-Knowledge’, were presented in 1984, while I was giving, in German, summer lectures and seminars in Munich. I met Andreas Kemmerling, Willi Vossenkuhl, Maria Eugenie Rivas Monroy, and (at a conference in Kirchberg, Austria) Brian O’Shaughnessy, long-term friends; and I benefited from connection with Dieter Henrich and the German tradition of interest in self-consciousness. I have marvelous memories of wandering Munich’s enormous park, Englische Garten, and of an epic hail storm that shattered all the windows in my apartment, and left its marks on cars in the city for many years afterwards. ‘Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge’ and ‘Content Preservation’ were developed before and during my time at All Souls, when I gave the Locke Lectures at Oxford, in 1993. I was fortunate in interacting fruitfully with Georg Kreisal, P. F. Strawson, and Martin Davies; and I found a friend and congenial fellow rationalist in Chris Peacocke. The beauty and warm glow of Oxford during that stay remain with me. I associate ‘Reason and the First Person’ with a conference in St. Andrews, Scotland, in 1995, where I first gave the main part of the paper. I recall the environment as bleakly, menacingly, and darkly beautiful. A conference on my work on self-knowledge in Granada in

1996 furthered my understanding of the main topic and drew me into more serious reflection on reflection. The exchange with Benejam in this volume is too small an indication of the stimulation I received throughout that conference. I was wonderfully hosted and befriended by Juan Acero, Maria Frapolli, and Manuel Carpenteiro. I had the immense good fortune of experiencing the otherworldly beauty of the Alhambra during both day and night—experiences I made sure to live again since then—and of seeing the mosque in Cordoba, the strangest important building that I have ever visited. I gave a version of ‘Memory and Persons’, I believe, in Paris in 2001, where I enjoyed the eccentricity of David Wiggins and became friends with Lucy O’Brien. The rose garden in the Bois de Boulogne, the Val de Grace cathedral, the luminous, underrated, Renaissance church St. Etienne du Mont, and a solo drive to Burgundy remain etched in memory. I associate giving the Dewey Lectures in New York in 2007 with the friendly hosting of Akeel Bilgrami and Carol Rovane. I also associate the event with observations of street life during arduous, but fascinating, trudges up and down Amsterdam Avenue in light, early winter snow. During those painful walks, I wondered whether, in view of the intensity of what was to become my nearly four-year bout with plantar fasciitis, I would ever be able to walk again normally. I connect revision of the lectures for publication with the joy of having finally returned to normal.

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