

Practical and Theoretical Reason in Modern Philosophy

Edited by

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Series in Philosophy



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Abbreviations

Works by Hume

Treatsie/THN = Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

EHU = Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Works by Locke

Essays = Locke, J. *Ensayos Sobre El Entendimiento Humano*. Translated by E. O'Gorman. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013.

Works by Leibniz

AG = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Philosophical Essays*. Edited and translated by R. Ariew and D. Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.

A = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Sämtliche Schriften Und Briefe*. Edited by the Akademie der Wissenschaften. Darmstadt-Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1875-1890.

GP = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*. Edited by C. I. Gerhardt. 7 vols. Berlin: Hildesheim, 1960-1961.

M = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. "Monadologie" in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, vol. 6 (Berlin: Hildesheim, 1960-1961).

Couturat = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Opuscules et Fragments Inédits de Leibniz. Extraits Des Manuscrits de La Bibliothèque Royale de Hanovre*. Edited by L. Couturat. Hildesheim: Olms, 1991.

Grua = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Textes Inédits d'après Les Manuscrites de La Bibliothèque Proviciale de Hannover*. Edited by Gastón Grua. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.

Finster = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Der Briefwechsel Mit Antoine Arnauld*. Translated by R. Finster. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997.

Robinet I = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Principes de La Nature et de La Grâce Fondés En Raison. Principes de La Philosophie Ou Monadologie*. Edited by André Robinet. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

Works by Immanuel Kant

BDG = Kant, Immanuel. "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God." In *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

GMS = Kant, Immanuel. "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals." In *Practical Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

KrV = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

KrP = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Lewis White Beck. Indianapolis: H. W. Sams, 1956.

KU = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

MF = Kant, Immanuel. "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (1786)." In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, edited by Gary Hatfield, Henry Allison, Michael Friedman, and Peter Heath, 171–270. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511498015.004>.

OP = Kant, Immanuel. *Opus Postumum*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

WDO = Kant, Immanuel. "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" In *Religion and Rational Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Works by Charles Sanders Peirce

EP 1 = Peirce, Charles S. "Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic: Further Consequences of Four Incapacities." In *The Essential Peirce*, edited by Nathan Houser and Christian J. W. Kloesel, 1:56-82. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

EP 2 = Peirce, Charles S. "Pragmatism and Abduction." In *The Essential Peirce*, edited by Peirce Edition Project, 2:226-240. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998

Introduction

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There are perhaps few more characteristically ‘modern’ philosophical anxieties than those which concern the relation between facts and values. Although modernity is often presented in terms of confidence in the natural sciences, centuries of remarkable scientific discovery have accompanied the erosion of inherited moral assumptions and a growing unease about the status of normative standards. As such, the enormity of scientific progress notwithstanding, modernity seems troubled by doubts concerning the place of values in the great scheme of things.

It is customary, in accounts of the transition from mediaeval to modern philosophy, to remark upon a rejection of Aristotelianism and the embrace of a mechanistic understanding of nature. Whereas to Aristotle and his mediaeval followers, the natural world appeared to be populated by instances of various substance-kinds, each with its own *telos* or function determinative of its particular good, Descartes and his successors saw only units of matter subject to mechanical laws of motion. In the ancient and mediaeval worlds, it had therefore been widely assumed that values are inherent, or instantiated, within the natural world, such that the latter could serve as a guide to the former and the more one came to know about nature, the more one would come to know about value. With the dawn of modernity, however, and the resulting entrenchment of a mechanistic outlook towards nature, it could no longer be expected that an understanding of the natural world might be relevant to understanding value. Such a ‘disenchantment’ of nature has its legacy in philosophical concerns which remain with us today. If values are not inscribed in nature, then on what basis are evaluations made? Are values merely subjective projections upon an inherently valueless world? What becomes, in

that case, of our concerns with such vital matters as the dignity of human beings, the best way to live and the right way to act? Of particular philosophical interest are questions concerning the role of reason in making sense of value. Does our alleged status as rational beings explain why we ought to regard some acts and states of affairs as better than others? Or is it because of some extra-rational facts about us that we are disposed to make the evaluations that we do?

The modern period in philosophy bears witness to an explosion of efforts to account for the possibility of value in a post-Aristotelian conception of nature. Although not very widely known as a contributor to ethical thought, Descartes's substance dualism sets the stage for modern debates concerning the relation between theoretical and practical reason by sharply distinguishing between a material domain vacant of value, and several minds or spiritual substances responsible for introducing values into our understanding of our experience. According to Descartes's dualistic picture, no state of the natural world has anything but mechanical properties and it is therefore necessary to look elsewhere, to the states of immaterial mental substances, if we are to understand how values enter the world. Spinoza's ethical concerns are explicit in the title of the work for which he has been most celebrated (as well as condemned) but are presented in the context of a mechanistic and deterministic outlook that presents value as relative to subjective interests. Amongst the great early-modern rationalist philosophers, Leibniz's long-neglected contributions to ethical philosophy are now the subject of much discussion. Despite his debts to Plato and Aristotle, however, Leibniz was no less the advocate of a mechanistic understanding of nature than any of his celebrated philosophical contemporaries and his ethical views must be understood within such a context.

Early modern empiricism, as represented in the works of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, is well-known for its contributions to ethical and political thought. His thoroughgoing mechanism notwithstanding, Hobbes thought it possible to develop a system of politics to which all reasonable agents could give their rational approval. Locke too was extremely critical of mediaeval scholastic philosophy and sought to replace it entirely with a philosophical outlook aligned with Newtonian physics. This acceptance of a "disenchanted" view of nature did not, however, prevent Locke from articulating a political philosophy based upon values of tolerance and individual dignity which has been amongst the most influential contributions any philosopher has made to the history of political thought. Berkeley's ethical and political views are less well-known, but are of a piece with his characteristically modern concern about the rise of materialist philosophy and the dangers which he detected such a philosophy to present for religion, morality and common sense. Of the great early modern empiricists, however, it is perhaps Hume who has made the most influential contribution to meta-ethics.

A late fruit in the development of the “practical” aspect of reason coalesced in the pervasive use of the concept of *praxis* after Kant. The term comes from Aristotle, representing one of the three basic activities that are proper to human beings, along with *poiesis* and *theoria*. Indeed, only human beings can exercise *praxis* because it is an activity that involves will and reason.¹ For Kant, however, *praxis* is the application of a theory to cases encountered in experience. This application has ethical content: Kant placed the practical above the theoretical and hence influenced the concept of *praxis* of all the German Idealists all the way down to Marx, where the concept became the engine of all Marx’s thought and revolutionary activity. The issue emerging in such emphasis, however, seems to be the radicalisation of the separation of theory and practice, an issue attached to the Marxist interpretation of *praxis*. Hannah Arendt discusses *praxis* in the context of practical activity and theory in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). Arendt compared the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa* and made clear that the active life is the only way to be fully rational: reason needs to involve the two movements and hence discover that some activities end in themselves and that the lack of thinking can end up in evil. For Arendt, the dichotomy needs to be transcended.

The aim of the present collection is to examine this fertile period in the history of philosophy with respect to its significance for understandings of the relation between theoretical and practical reason, or, relatedly, facts and values. Our contributors have explored different important ways in which both the shortcomings and insights of the theoretical/practical distinction have shaped Western philosophy.

The book starts with a study by Paniel Reyes Cárdenas that explores the debate between realism and nominalism about universals, which took place towards the end of the greatest period of Scholastic Philosophy. It is not only important, but necessary for a full understanding of the distinction between theoretical and practical reasons to find the origins of the differing paths. Indeed, the suspicions of nominalist philosophers about the nature of reasoning itself had the consequence of a concept of reason that divides the objects of theoretical and practical reason: the theoretical world as a reflection of the items of experience and conceptual content, while practical reason will be a reflection of the world of will and action. This duality precludes the later famous fact/value dichotomy, but is derivative of a suspicion about the continuity of experiences both theoretical and practical as isolated sources of reason. This position is derivative of nominalism, and we could hence state that many modern philosophers are intellectual descendants of mediaevals such as

¹ Aristotle, “Poetics,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1449b24.

William of Ockham, Jean Buridan and other nominalists. The realism that mediaeval scholastics defended avoided this division, and we can find a reconciliation with this tradition hinted in the thoughts of modern philosophers such as Leibniz, Hegel and Schelling for whom the “universals” are central to the unity of reason.

In “Distinct Perception and Belief,” Evelyn Vargas examines through an organised presentation Leibniz’s theory of perception to explain how to make sense of an experience as the perceiver’s reasons for believing something about the state of the world. According to Vargas, early modern philosophers, following Kepler’s model of the retinal image, are responsible for introducing the idea that perception and thought require some mental entities as immediate objects, having as a result that beliefs based on perception are uncertain and that there is metaphysical isolation of the mind. Far away from these sceptical consequences, Vargas holds that Leibniz had a theory of sense perception that can explain perceptual content, avoid the “veil of perception scepticism” and justify the reliability of senses. This chapter contributes with a relevant indication of the actuality of Leibniz’s thought, that connects his ideas with those of Merleau-Ponty and the existentialists as an important precedent of the importance of the body as both perceiving and perceived.

Related to this topic, Leonardo Ruiz Gómez analyses some of the most relevant aspects of Leibniz’s theory of apperception by making a comparison between first- and high-order theories. According to Ruiz, both approaches miss that apperception in Leibniz has a synthetic character since they seem to outline the lower levels of apperception unsatisfactorily. They miss an important sense of apperception that Ruiz regarded as “non-conscious sensation,” a concept that should be distinguished from bare perception and also from any sort of conscious content. On a different approach, Roberto Casales takes Leibniz’s distinction between perception, apperception, phenomenal or sensitive consciousness, and reflective *conscientia* to distinguish three different constitutive levels of identity implied in Leibniz’s notion of personal identity. While the first level is intimately related to his notion of completeness and his principle of the identity of indiscernibles, according to Casales, Leibniz distinguishes this kind of individuation and simplicity from the kind of unity that can be found in his characterisation of natural machines. Living beings have a teleological structure by which every organ is related to each other, a nested structure that presupposes an organic-sensorial structure. This level, however, can also be distinguished from a third one, in which Leibniz articulates his conception of personal identity as related to the moral quality of rational beings.

In “A Critical Review of the Structure of Scientific Knowledge in George Berkeley: An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision”, Laura Benítez states that

Berkeley's theory of vision is relevant not only to articulate his epistemology but also to impulse the development of psychology. This empirical and psychological proposal also reveals that even when mathematics can be a useful instrument that, correctly applied, can contribute to the development of knowledge, according to Benítez, Berkeley recommends that we need to understand its limits at the level of acquisition of our sensible ideas. This chapter, then, shows how Berkeley's ideas on vision generated an ever-bigger gulf between the theoretical and the practical accounts of perception. The following contribution compares Spinoza and Kant's views about the distinction between theoretical and practical reason to understand in which sense, even when both philosophers defend the priority of the practical over the theoretical kind of rationality, they arrive at this conclusion from a very different way. Tomaszewska's contribution also shows the connections with contemporary debates, so her analysis is not only strong but timely, showing how the discussion works as a prelude to later accounts given in twentieth-century phenomenology. According to Anna Tomaszewska, while Spinoza takes the propensity of human consciousness to generate metaphysical illusions and misrepresent reality as a reason to defend the priority of practical reason, Kant places the practical over the theoretical reason trying to provide a coherent account of human action.

The following two contributions, by Stéfano Straulino and Jimena Portilla, also deal with Kant's philosophy's theoretical and practical aspects. In the first contribution, Straulino introduces us to the central problems that come from the relation between apperception and self-knowledge. According to Straulino's approach, by considering Kant's distinction between the pure and the empirical sense of consciousness, we can probe that self-consciousness does not occur unrestrictedly: we need to be related to something different from consciousness to be conscious of ourselves. Straulino's analysis is an excellent reflection on the "I think" in Kant. The discussion of perception and apperception with reference to human psychology offers an important contribution to the literature. It will also be of interest to students and scholars in other disciplines.

In Kant's philosophy, however, we can also see a practical approach to the problem of consciousness, precisely when we talk about moral conscience, considered, according to Portilla, as a relevant aspect for moral evaluation and, in consequence, for moral reasoning. As we can see in this chapter, Portilla relates not only moral conscience with the evaluation of our maxims but also with radical evil and self-deception, since moral conscience helps us prevent our moral disposition from mixing or using a completely immoral ground for our maxims. This is a very timely chapter. We need to learn how radical evil is

grounded in the neutrality of consciousness, and therefore the importance of integrating reason is paramount.

In “Kant, Peirce, and the Rationality of Natural Science”, Daniel Herbert analyses Peirce’s criticisms of Kant’s concept of synthetic reasoning and his lack of explanation of the possibility of synthetic *a posteriori* judgments. The first part of the chapter is a contribution in its own right offering new perspectives on Kant’s analysis. However, the use of Peirce’s critique in the second part locates this discussion in a wider constellation of thinkers, something that adds up to a glimpse of how it is possible to get out of the dichotomy of theory and practice. The difference regarding the need for a philosophical explanation of synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, according to Herbert, explains why Kant and Peirce are led to pursue significantly distinct inquiries with respect to the grounds of scientific knowledge. Whereas Kant takes it that a Transcendental Deduction is called for in order to satisfy the demand for an explanation of the *a priori* grounds of those synthetic *a priori* judgements without which natural science would be impossible, Peirce makes it his objective to explain the enabling conditions of the possibility of scientific knowledge as a long-running process of inquiry making use of synthetic inference.

Finally, in the last chapter of this book, Tom O’Shea questions the limits of self-legislation and some forms of constructivism that can be formulated from some modern approaches, like the Kantian and Humean conceptions of normativity. In order to do so, O’Shea outlines and critiques two neo-Hegelian forms of constructivism that present alternatives to the Kantian and Humean positions. The author takes the reader directly into the crux of the issue they wish to discuss. In doing so the author also provides an excellent historical framing and contextualisation of the problems involved in self-legislation.

The progression of the chapters allows us to appreciate that the theoretical and practical reason distinction was the seminal intuition to establish different theories of perception and reason that will underpin the theoretical. Practical reason, however, was to be developed through the efforts of making sense of how individuals can appropriate the autonomy and freedom that is supposed in the moral life. Our different contributions show how these parting ways finally have to meet up again, and this is how late modernity, particularly through German Idealism, exhibits a need to reintegrate the two aspects of reason that, interestingly, leads us back to the discussion that saw modernity emerge.

Then, the different contributions to this collection express distinctive aspects of the theoretical and practical reason distinction, showing some of its fundamental assumptions as well as considering how Western philosophy has been shaped by the articulation of reason in such a way. This understanding will help to figure out what are the needs for a more integrated conception of reason that helps articulate both its theoretical and practical dimensions.

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