

Rationality without Reasons

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This paper challenges the assumption that reasons are intrinsic to rational action. A great many actions are not best understood as ones in which the agent acted for reasons—and yet they can be understood as rational, and as open to rational criticism. The relative paucity of explicit reason-giving, practical arguments in daily life presents a general philosophical problem. It reflects the existence of a class of ways in which reason can regulate action, which goes far beyond producing reasons or applying principles. Much practical reasoning takes the form of what H. P. Grice called ‘thought-transitions.’ These are neither in the form of standard practical arguments, nor can they be so reconstructed without distorting the ways in which an agent thinks. Some actions to which one is led by a thought transition are rational, namely when what Grice called a ‘propension’ towards a given class of actions—a standing inclination to act in certain ways—would itself stand up to rational evaluation. The paper examines two bases for such endorsement, one local and limited, and one much more speculative, due to Grice himself.

1. Introduction

This essay challenges the assumption that all rational action is acting for reasons. It argues that a great many actions are not best understood as ones in which the agent acted for reasons—and yet they can be understood as rational, intelligible, and open to rational criticism. This is a thesis about practical thinking: in many cases, the thought that precedes action should not be represented in standard forms of reason-giving argument, either deductive or inductive. It is misleading to try to reconstruct such thought as reasoned argument, and we should have other ways in which to understand the rationality of a great deal of practical decision-making.

These assertions will first be illustrated by commonplace, everyday, situations. I shall then offer a theoretical explanation of these phenomena, in which H. P. Grice’s notion of a ‘thought-transition’ replaces the more familiar idea of reasoned argument. Thought-transitions may be rational without being founded on reasons, because they are instances of standing inclinations to act in certain ways, inclinations that are themselves systematically and in general valuable. Such ‘propensions’, as Grice called them, can themselves be rationally evaluated, and it is

from such evaluations, rather than in the giving of reasons in terms of specific objectives, that rationality without reasons makes sense.

Here are some examples from daily life. You decide to have a sociable meal at a familiar restaurant, one of several that you might have settled on. You turn back from a mountain path that just feels scary. Even acting on a whim may be rational without there being reasons for doing so. These situations can be understood by adapting some ideas from Grice's work on rationality in the 1970s, including ideas that emerged in discussions between Paul Grice and myself.¹ There have been many important discussions of neighbouring issues since then, such as whether desires are, or are not, the basis of reasons. No one, however, seems to have made quite the points Grice and I sought to make.

To some degree the essay tracks our explorations and arguments. It exhibits a methodology that was not uncommon at the time, one that Grice so clearly mastered. He called it linguistic botanizing. It was intended neither to catalogue nor to analyse ordinary usage. The point was, to use our mastery of language to help explain theoretical distinctions. Grice was also happy, perhaps too happy, to invent his own technical vocabulary. Although I develop ideas taken from Grice, I do not aim at a definitive exegesis. I shall, however, repeat some of his own examples so as not to ignore their playfulness, a non-negligible aspect of the way he did philosophy.

2. Familiar situations in which one acts rationally without having reasons

Reasons for action are understood to be considerations that count in favour of an action in what would be the proper reflection or deliberation of an agent. Reasons justify because they are essentially tied to the agent's evaluation of what it is good/required/obligatory (and the like) to do. Reasons need not be conclusive, and they may be outweighed; but it would be an error of the agent not to think they mattered. When they are not outweighed, reasons justify. In contrast, an agent who simply finds something appealing may not, and rationally need not, think that going for what appealed to her would on that account be justified. She need not be prepared to defend or commend her action, although

¹ Paul Grice and I engaged in weekly conversations over a number of years. I took notes that he reviewed in the subsequent meeting. Our private conversations as well as joint seminars in those years ranged over a number of questions whose focus was rationality, most prominently, questions about wanting, evaluation, reasons, and incontinence. One selection of notes, entitled 'Some aspects of Reasons and Rationality', looks most closely at the relation of reasons to rationality, and is closest to the ideas developed here.

she may defend it against someone who claims that her action is bad or irrational. The distinction is between, on the one hand, judging something to be good, or evaluation proper, and, for some cases, finding something appealing or desirable. But 'appealing' is too narrow; the class that stands in contrast to our judgements of value includes various kinds of propensities to act. The argument of this paper relies on a distinction between evaluation, strictly speaking, and attitudes favouring or being averse to a course of action. Evaluation proper requires that one be prepared to defend one's evaluation. This is to be distinguished from a positive attitude towards, or being 'for' a particular proposal. It may well be true that we think of and speak of what is appealing or pleasant as good. Philosophers have long observed that not every use of the word 'good' is strictly evaluative. We may express our favouring something, whether in the mode of wanting or of opting for, in language that at most sounds evaluative, meaning no more than 'the thing to do'. Strictly speaking, judging something to be good, requires that (as a rational being) one be prepared to defend one's judgement in a positive way, perhaps as conforming to some general position or standpoint.² Neither going for what is appealing nor being disposed to turn away from what one finds 'scary' is automatically to be reconstructed in terms of acting for what one finds valuable or acting for reasons. In some cases, however, the action may be rational, in that it is positively OK, but no more than that. It is not commended, but the disposition to act in such a way is connected to evaluation. I return to this point later in the paper.

Deliberation or proper reflection refers to argument. An agent who acts for a reason need not have rehearsed the argument before acting, but a reconstruction of the agent's thought in terms of the argument must not distort the motivation attributed to the agent. This is essential to this paper's distinction between acting for a reason and actions that, while rational, are not done for a reason.

Given their link to deliberation, it is not surprising that reasons cannot be attributed to an agent without taking into account their role in a specific context of guiding action. My arguments rest on attending to the context in order to determine whether reasons may be attributed to an agent. What counts as a reason for action in one situation may not be a reason in another. While it seems clear that reasons are essentially

²This position is close to that of Gary Watson (1987). Watson wished to distinguish (p. 150) between finding something pleasant and evaluating it. But since he distinguishes between valuing and evaluating, he thinks that an agent may (perhaps perversely) 'value' what she is not prepared to defend.

connected to evaluations, it is important to recognize that what matters is whether the evaluation can be thought of as playing a role in deliberation. Whims illustrate this point. I agree with Warren Quinn (1993, p. 249) that, despite some philosophical examples, it is extremely hard to find whims that lack any evident appeal. But I draw a different conclusion; whether one is idiosyncratic in finding some action appealing or whether only the timing or means is capricious, acting on a whim is not a case of acting on a reason. Whether one acts on a reason depends on whether an evaluation moves an agent, whether a consideration is present to the agent in the form of a principle for action, or as justification for her action. Even if I typically visit my hometown out of duty, or because I view it as a good thing to visit relatives, a visit might also just appeal to me as something to do one day. I do not then go because of my evaluation.

Most philosophers have treated the incontinent individual as acting for a reason. The authors of Baker and Grice 1985 are exceptions, arguing that, typically, the incontinent individual does not act on a reason. In one simple type of case of incontinence, the thought of what is pleasant disrupts rational deliberation, and comes with no commendation, without authority. In a more complex case of incontinence, such as those discussed in Baker and Grice 1985, what starts off in reflection as a consideration may be either explicitly or implicitly silenced, ruled out-of-court. Other philosophers, such as T. M. Scanlon (1998, p. 51), have noted that as part of the deliberative process, some reasons may lead the agent to judge that other considerations do not count. The agent cannot then think they are reasons that justify a course of action unless he evades full knowledge or deceives himself.

Suppose a man must, in the first instance, decide between buying what he has dreamed of, a sports car (in this case a Porsche has been his long favourite), and a practical, economical family car (in this case he has narrowed the field to a Ford or a Chevrolet). Suppose he decides to buy a family car; the consideration of transporting the family is, unfortunately, one that trumps others. Indeed, it makes irrelevant such features as the high-speed cornering qualities of a sports car. He proceeds to compare the Ford and Chevrolet. But, incontinently, he rushes out to his Porsche dealer and buys a Porsche. If, when asked why he bought a Porsche, he cites its great cornering ability, we can agree that this is what (partially) motivates him. But practical reasoning on his part has determined that this is not a *reason*.

He could indeed overturn his commitment to buying a family car. The high-performance attributes of the Porsche might even be his rea-

sons for abandoning that project, given the additional support of thinking 'at my age I am free to buy my dream car'. But if no such reflection or deliberation took place, given that he is still engaged in buying a family car, these are not reasons. His self-description made certain considerations relevant, and silenced others.

The above example also suggests ways in which evaluations may not simply fail to guide but are 'misused', put to the work of self-deception or evasion of self-knowledge. An individual, who behaves incontinently in buying the Porsche, may say 'The Porsche is the best car'. The incontinent individual who thinks and says, 'The Porsche is the best car', may use those words to deceive himself, and thus think that this justifies his action. But he cannot in all lucidity say, 'It is the best family car', or 'It is the best car for me to buy'. These are precluded by his deliberations and judgements.

What is true of reasons is true of practical rationality more generally. One cannot delineate kinds of rational action without understanding the role of argument, what can count as argument (and its steps), or can be reconstructed in the form of argument, and, when argument is appropriate, for guiding action. What is evident when one begins to look for examples of argument leading to action, is the relative paucity of explicit practical arguments in human life. This presents a very general philosophical problem in understanding reasons. I see this lack as reflecting the existence of a larger domain for reason's regulation of action than that of producing reasons or applying principles. The next section argues that much of practical reasoning takes the form of what Grice called 'thought-transitions'. These are neither in the form of standard practical arguments, nor can they be so reconstructed without distorting the reflection of the agent. There are similar thought-transitions, that is, reasonings that do not rely on reasons, in theoretical thinking as well. The next sections consider what makes thought-transitions rational.

3. Thought-transitions

Thought-transitions in practical affairs do involve thinking before acting, but reasons are neither invoked nor relied on. It is not a question of unreflective action as against reasoned deliberation, but of moving from one thought to another in a way that is entirely rational, even though reasons are not in play. Here are some examples: on a walk in the mountains, an individual thinks 'I do not like the look of that, so I'm going back'. After reading a newspaper report, 'I feel like doing

something for the drought victims, so I'll send a check to Oxfam'. After a seminar, 'It would be fun to go to dinner tonight, so let us go to O Mei's; that is a good place'.

While these are not explicit arguments, it might be thought that they could be put in argument form. If the action is to be rational, then, it will be suggested, they must be capable of being reconstructed in a standard argument form. Thus the third example, cast into argument form might start with any one of the four premisses (1a)–(1d):

- (1a) Given my present state, I *should* do what is fun
- (1b) Given my present state, the *best* thing for me to do would be to do what is fun
- (1c) For me in my present state it would make for my well-being, to have fun
- (1d) Having fun is good (or, a good)
- (2) Going to dinner would be fun
- (3) Going to O Mei's would be/make for dinner fun

So, I'll go to O Mei's

None of the candidates for the first premiss is acceptable. It is evident that the agent who feels like going to dinner could easily reject (1a)–(1c), thinking them false or having no reason to assert them. She just finds that going out to dinner has a specific appeal, right now.

The only plausible candidate is (1d). This proposition, and the more general one, 'pleasure is good', may well be thought by the agent to be true, but (1d) is not an acceptable reconstruction of the agent's thinking, when she says 'It would be fun to go out to dinner tonight'. Going out to dinner with old chums looks like fun. It has a specific appeal. It is an appeal different from not going where it looks dangerous, or feeling like doing something for a friend, or having supper with a deserving group of students—and so on. The agent does not represent dining with the gang as a good to pursue, or not dining with them as an evil to avoid.

The contrast I wish to highlight is between (i) acting on a project one finds appealing/unappealing, on the one hand, and (ii) acting because of, on the basis of, one's evaluation. The first may be perfectly rational, but only in the second will there be reasons. My focus in this paper is (i), those actions where we do what appeals to us, including those examples where the appeal is of what is pleasant or enjoyable. This is

not to deny that on some occasions the desire for pleasure may be a reason or be offered as a reason. I will look at such a case below.

Even if a critic insisted that (1d) is the way to represent our finding something to be appealing, and that it should be regarded as a respectable evaluation, the assembled propositions will not do the work of a standard argument. The premisses do not support or yield the conclusion as in a standard argument. (1d) through (3) above can be said to yield the conclusion, or directive, for the particular agent whose thought process it is, only on the basis of a subjective condition: that the agent is in a certain subjective state, namely, feels like going out for dinner-fun.

Rational beings (the agent at some other time, or other individuals) who do not have that feeling, will not accept the conclusion. They may well accept as true 'It is fun to dine out', but will not accept it as a directive unless they feel like it now. Someone wondering what to do for the evening might think that if she were to go to dinner she would find it fun or pleasant, but right now she does not feel like going out. That is in general the end of the matter.

An essential feature of such cases is that the alleged argument lacks normativity; it is not authoritative or directive unless there is a supportive argument that she needs/ought to do something diverting/pleasant tonight. Practical arguments are different. Even if an agent did not feel like going to the dentist, an agent would think 'I ought to have a dental check up yearly, now is the time, so I should see my dentist', to be a directive with some force. It articulates a practical argument.

Perhaps the strongest attempt to reconstruct (acceptable or rational) thought-transitions as standard arguments is to treat the state of mind, 'I feel like having dinner-fun tonight', as a premiss, for then the premisses would support the conclusion. But the individual, whose thought-transition we are examining, does not regard a description of her inner state as a consideration that supports the conclusion. Casting it in this role is a distortion or a falsification of the thinking that guides her action. It is the pleasant prospect of going out to dinner that moves her to think of O Mei's and to go there.

The analysis given for the thought transition that leads to going out to dinner at O Mei's can serve as a model. When the path ahead looks dangerous, an individual may think 'I do not like the look of that, I am going back' or 'That is a scary path, I am going back' or 'It is frightening, I am going back'. Just as analyses of the thinking preceding going to O Mei's needs to recognize the force of the appeal of the restaurant, neither 'That looks dangerous' nor 'It is frightening' can be reconstructed

in terms that portray the agent's inner state as the consideration that supports turning back. Similarly, the agent does not act on a principle such as 'One should/it is good to turn back from what looks dangerous'. The agent is not assessing the situation in the manner of recommending to others a similar action. She does rely on her own sense of danger. In this, she is similar to expert climbers, whose expertise may be thought to give authority to their judgements. I want to anticipate discussion of thought-transitions in the theoretical realm in order to adequately characterize this thought transition. The agent is not in the grip of fear; she might have used any of the opening statements; in the imagined situation, there is no loss of control. I will later argue that the thought transition is rational because it expresses a propension that is evaluated as one good to have. I do not argue that this kind of action is rational or intelligible because it is the expression of an emotion. What is evident is the similarity of this action and one taken by an expert. The present agent's view that the path ahead looks dangerous is indeed 'felt' or 'coloured by feeling', while an expert climber may be at a distance from her feelings. Both individuals, however, rely on experience and can be said to trust their own judgement. That expert climbers or hikers may typically find or think a path dangerous without accompanying feelings of fear is not important to my distinction. Neither individual forms an inductive argument to support going back from what looks dangerous; reconstruction in terms of such an argument would fail to distinguish between relying on the past and justification of present claims in terms of past success.

4. Three classes of action

It will be useful to look more closely at a pair of closely related examples to note when it is appropriate to reconstruct thinking in the form of argument. Cynthia, hiking with a friend in the mountains, comes to a difficult spot and says, 'I do not like the look of that, I am frightened. I am going back'. That is usually enough for Cynthia to return, and for the friend to turn back with her. Cynthia's action of turning back, admittedly motivated by fear, is, while not acting on reasons, none the less rational unless we judge her *fear* to be irrational. And her decision to go back is not in the least unreflective: she takes stock, and decides not to go on.

Cynthia's subjective condition can indeed serve as a premiss, but only in a very different situation. Cynthia resorts to reasons. Suppose that, while her friend does not think Cynthia's fear irrational, she still

attempts to persuade her to go on. After listening, Cynthia may say ‘I am so frightened it is not worth it. I am not enjoying this walk anymore’. Or ‘I am too frightened to be able to safely go on’. Or ‘I often walk in these mountains and do not usually get frightened. The fact that I am now, is a good indication that this is a dangerous trail and I should turn back’. These are reasons, considerations implicitly backed by principles, and they could be the initial motivations of someone. But in Cynthia’s case they emerged when she was challenged. They do not express her initial practical reasoning. She was frightened by the trail ahead, wanted to go back, and did not have any reason not to.³ Faced with her friend’s objections, however, she needed justification for acting on her fear. She quickly found reason(s) to act on her fear. But this does not imply that these reasons entered into her original thought-transition.

If some thought-transitions leading to action are found to be rational, we may suppose that there are three classes of action: (1) *strongly* justified actions, which are supported by (good) reasons; (2) *weakly* justified actions, motivated by thought-transitions that are judged rational;⁴ and (3) actions motivated by thought-transitions that are without that commendation. ‘Weakly justified’ is a new term, meant to indicate a positive form of permission, although there is no one who permits. Instead of the dichotomy obligatory/forbidden (or good/bad) where *permitted* is equivalent to not-forbidden, there is introduced the idea of an action that is positively ‘OK’.

To say that Cynthia’s action, motivated not by a reason but by fear, is rational, is to say it was OK for her to do it, that her action is weakly justified. The claim that some actions may be weakly justified must be supported, but I want to forestall a misunderstanding that might arise from the language of strong and weak justification. In cases of conflict,

³ Note that there is no general rational requirement always to act on reasons, and no general truth that a rational individual would be better off the more often she acted on reasons.

⁴ There are similarities here to Jonathan Dancy’s category of enticing reasons (2004). Unlike pre-emptory reasons, Dancy claims that enticing reasons, such as prospective pleasure, do not yield ‘oughts’; it is not wrong, although it may be silly not to act on an unopposed enticing reason. While what I call weakly justified actions do not entail an ought judgement, they are not the same as actions done for enticing reasons. In those contexts where prospective pleasure is a reason, it is an enticing reason. But being attracted to what is pleasant and pursuing it, is not always acting for a reason. Thought-transitions characterize prospective action in a favourable light, but what makes one favour them is not an independent contribution or consideration. That ‘pleasantness’ here counts in favour of acting depends on the agent’s subjective condition, of feeling like doing the act in question. Not being moved, on a given occasion, to act on what one judges to be pleasant is not silly. It is not, on its own, subject to rational criticism if a person does not feel like it. A person can be criticized, however, who never, or rarely, feels like doing what she judges pleasant, and never, or rarely, acts on what she *feels* like doing.

weakly justified actions are generally, but not always, inferior to strongly justified actions, actions supported by reasons. To meet the challenge of her friend, who proposed an alternative backed by reasons, Cynthia defended her action. She called on principles, finding reasons that supported her initial motivation to turn back. In another situation, a different principle might have convinced her that she ought to overcome her fear. But the mere fact that an acceptable principle opposes an agent's motivation does not insure the rational superiority of the principle. The agent who wants to go to O Mei's may be challenged by herself or another person, 'You always want to go to O Mei's. You are in a rut'. It is not evident that the implied principle 'It is bad to be in a rut' ought, rationally to win out. It is clear that in practice it sometimes does, and sometimes does not.

5. Thought-transitions in theoretical reasoning

Do thought-transitions play a role in theoretical reasoning, in reasoning to statements of fact, rather than what to do?⁵ There are certainly appraisals in the world of action that support strategies rather than intentions, and which resemble thought-transitions: 'That looks dangerous, so it would be better to try it differently.' 'That is a significantly bigger than normal chair—it will take two men to move it.' More important, we see what look like thought-transitions in the purely theoretical realm: 'Those cells look abnormal. It is likely that the patient's leukaemia is no longer in remission.' Not all rational beings who accept the 'premiss' need accept the terminus, even supposing there are no counter-indicating additional premisses in mind. Unlike the practical transitions discussed earlier, however, the appraisals above are licensed on the basis of experience, or expertise. The statements of appearances yield licensed 'conclusions' only if made by an (acknowledged) expert. This makes it look as if we can reconstruct the thought process, adding 'The judgement that ... (repeating here the premiss) is affirmed by an expert' to yield a genuine argument. But the proposed reconstruction does not seem to be a correct representation of the individual's thinking. One typically *relies* on one's past success, rather than arguing on the basis of it. If queried, or contested, an individual would argue, by appealing to past experience and success. At the moment of the alleged thought-transition, however, the individual is not concerned to

⁵ I was prompted to consider a possible role for licensed thought-transitions in non-practical reasoning by Phil Clark and Jennifer Whiting. Conversations with Clark and Whiting have contributed to the development of this paper in many ways.

strongly justify, to answer possible objections to her observations. She is none the less engaged in rational formation of belief.

Thought-transitions do have a part to play in theoretical reasoning, but differences from their practical counterparts remain. It is expertise that licenses transitions in the theoretical realm. The conditions under which further justification or scrutiny is appropriate also differ. The move to genuine argument in the non-practical domain is accepted as a move to what is more reliable, even if it is not an accurate representation of the individual's thinking process. The agent often, and appropriately, relies on her expertise without using it as a premiss to support a conclusion. Individuals engaged in laboratory work and in general the work of discovery, need to rely on their expertise before they turn to justification. None the less, when questioned by themselves or others, 'How do you know?' or 'Why do I believe ...?', individuals will turn to argument proper and to reasons. They will provide reasons based on their past success or on further determination of evidence. The turn to reasons proper in the theoretical domain may be a result of our contemporary social practices; it is none the less *now* judged always appropriate that rational enquirers should scrutinize their judgements. This may not mark a significant difference in the two realms, since the reasons *not* to subject one's practical thought-transitions to such scrutiny are strongly tied to certain contexts and activities. Contrast the thought-transition that leads one to buy a gift for a friend and the argument one presents in a letter of reference.

6. Propensions

What makes us say that some, but not all, thought-transitions in the practical realm are rational? This question does not address the distinction between strong and weak justification, but rather that between weak justification and no justification.

For the beginning of a short answer, note that some kinds of motivation are good to have. Those are the ones involved in thought-transitions that we call rational. Grice introduced the idea of 'propensions', inclinations or motives he thought could be established as ones that are good to have. The idea of evaluating motives in this way was central to, and seemed to make sense of, a notion of weak justification of actions.

A propension is to be thought of as a more, or relatively, primitive capacity that has survived in humans, and that continues to guide action. Grice was well aware that this was a sort of evolutionary fantasy. He thought it a good tool to think about the fundamentals of rational

action. Impolite critics of the more enthusiastic wings of current evolutionary psychology accuse them of telling Just-So Stories. Grice was deliberately telling Just-So Stories. He had not the slightest intention of advancing an evolutionary ethics founded on known biological facts

There is, for rational beings, another capacity, acting on principles. Propensions should not, however, be thought of as necessarily non-rational. While behaviour prompted by what is pleasant may be an activity of non-rational, as well as rational beings, feeling like helping someone who helped you may be an activity peculiar to rational beings, possibly including non-humans. Thought-transitions ‘certified’ as OK or rational may be considered the articulation of those inclinations or motives Grice called propensions. Propensions and their articulation in thought are certified together.

Here are some examples, and possible groupings, of propensions. Doing what one believes to be enjoyable or pleasant, relaxing, avoiding what is unpleasant or merely uncomfortable, acting out of curiosity, pursuing something intriguing, going for what has some kind of appeal—these are all familiar human dispositions and, I will argue, have a common justification. This group would also include acting on all or most whims, or caprices, but exclude mere urges or the kind of bare ‘plumping-for’ illustrated by simply opting to bet on red rather than black. A second common group of propensions include: acting to avoid what ‘looks dangerous’, avoiding or taking cautionary steps regarding a person who ‘looks suspicious’, and in general feelings that have cognitive content regarding our safety. Another important group includes the dispositions that express emotional feelings such as acting out of gratitude, sympathy or fellow feeling, and the like.

The approvability of a thought-transition depends on the propension that it expresses. The kind of evaluation or endorsement that is connected to propensions may be made clearer by saying what it is not. Approval does not rest on the value, or might be called the ‘modest’ good, of what is attained. In the case of the first group above, endorsement does not take as its target the future enjoyment, or whatever makes for the direct appeal of the action. Rather, the positive evaluation of propensions takes as its object the propension or inclination itself. Acting in line with some feelings is endorsed, or thought good. Although it is my particular individual promptings that count, this is not a matter of illegitimately counting my preferences twice.⁶ For while reasons often rest on appraisal of the end or object of the action, the aesthetic or prudential or moral value of what one seeks, this is not true

⁶ Cf. the dispute between Joseph Raz and Ruth Chang (Chang 2004, pp. 62 ff).

in the case of propensions. To license the thought-transition for what is pleasant or fun is to think, it is OK to be moved by what is pleasant. It may be thought that approval presupposes that pleasure is, in some sense, a good. I do not wish to deny, or to affirm, that pleasure is a good. The evaluation relevant to propensions is not of the form 'To have x is a good thing' but 'The inclination to have x is a good inclination, or one we ought to have.' 'I'm uncomfortable in this chair, so I'll move', is an OK transition, but not because one thinks that the world would then be a better place or that a man is maximizing his happiness by moving, or that being a bit uncomfortable is bad. Rather, one thinks that an inclination to remove one's discomfort is a good thing with which people should be equipped.

While I have yet to characterize the considerations that back up the endorsement of an inclination, the position outlined so far says something more than that as individuals we go for, or pursue, what we like, or what has a certain affective feel. For, as rational, we subject our motivations and our actions to evaluation. The question raised here is what is to be said for doing what we feel like doing or what is appealing, and so on. I have already argued, with respect to thought-transitions, that representation of the felt appeal as a premiss in a standard argument is a distortion of the thought that issues in action. To recall: the agent does not regard *doing what I feel like* as a reason or justification for going to O Mei's in the example given. It is the attractiveness of O Mei's, just as in other examples it is the scariness of the road, the generosity of N, which gives rise to the concluding action.

The felt character of those desires called propensions matters.⁷ In so far as propensions are substitutes for principles and worth preserving, they must *guide* and not merely cause human actions. That an action is represented as appealing or as avoiding what is unappealing may be essential to what it is to 'guide' action (at this primitive level) rather than simply cause it. Emotional feelings, including non-hedonic ones, if there are any, show the same feature. To guide requires that one can

⁷ Chang (2004) interestingly speaks of affective feel, to mark off a class of desires from mere bare philosophical desires on the one hand and mere urges on the other. There may be an 'affective feel' to many and perhaps all of the cases I am considering of practical thinking preceding and leading to action. But that aspect of thinking is not the source of the distinction that interests me. The agent's thought or claim has practical significance: it would be fun to go out to dinner, that path looks dangerous, and so on. Such a statement reveals a positive consideration for acting in a certain way, but I wish to argue that it is not an evaluation proper or a standard judgement of what is of value. Nor do I wish to claim that the agent indirectly appeals to a story that makes her choice intelligible because that story refers to an emotional state. The agents in my situations are not describable as being in the 'grip of an emotion'. My claim is that what characterizes this class of practical thinking is its practical significance, leading to action, which is not adequately characterized in the form of standard argument.

exercise some control or monitoring. An individual who does what she enjoys continues to do so, as long as she enjoys the activity and nothing else intervenes. Similarly, she may slow down, or stop doing what ceases to appeal. Moreover, appeal or disappeal allows the agent to represent the action in imagination and retrospection in a form that has motivational force.

The discussion of thought-transitions has assumed the commonality of a variety of actions described as doing what is appealing, a class that includes going for what looks pleasant or enjoyable. It includes actions done on impulse and its subclass of whims or caprice. Acting on a whim has an added feature: the idea has a specific sort of appeal, which might be called aesthetic that involves the stance of spectator as well as agent. Acting on impulse is one specific kind of response to what is appealing. An idea occurs to an agent and appeals to her. Sometimes the appeal requires no explanation, as in a sudden impulse to go off to the mountains for a day's walk in solitude. When the appeal is indirect, as a sudden impulse to touch someone's third toe, explanation is needed for this to count as acting on impulse: perhaps that the action was seen as an expression of affection. Because it is action on impulse, the desire to touch the other person's toe must have been felt straight away as a desire to express affection, not arise as a result of reflection, or a search for the means to some end, for example, seduction. Where there are actions that are means to the action x , which, on impulse, an agent resolves or plans to do, those actions count as acting on the impulse to x only if they are seen by the agent straightaway as somehow constitutive of x -ing and not as a result of a search for the best means.

Acting on impulse is like going for what is pleasant without deliberation about means, except that when one acts on impulse the idea must 'strike' the agent. It may help to counter possible objections to classifying acting on impulse as rational, to note that an impulse is not a compulsion. Impulse speaks in the voice of 'Why not do such and such?', of what appeals, not in the voice of command: 'Do such and such!' or 'You must do such and such!'. There is no general rule or principle that states grounds for the appeal of what one does on impulse, as is the case in general for doing what appeals to one.

There may occasionally be such a principle but it is not a standing practical principle for the agent; it does not regulate her activity. Another way to put this is to say that acting on impulse excludes acting in accordance with a principle (even a very general 'maximize pleasure' principle). It seems one could not have a sudden impulse to feather one's nest, advance one's career, improve conditions of child labour in

the developing world, or serve the nation. This is not because acting on impulse is 'emotional' in some way. Individuals may act in the heat of a passion elicited by gifted speakers or skilful rhetoric, but when enthusiasm is whipped up and individuals are manipulated to accept principles, the individuals do not act on impulse.⁸

The class of rational actions that is under discussion in this paper is potentially very wide, but it reflects an important distinction. There are many kinds of voluntary actions that are neither weakly justified nor done for reasons. Some of them may seem close to acting on a whim, perhaps because they are thought of as diversions, such as running one's hand across fence rails. But the agent does not imagine or envisage them as appealing, so they are pointless in that way. Some actions are not easily classifiable: making stones skip on water is typically not done for some purpose, but has an inner purposiveness: one tries to make the stone skip as many times as possible. Whether or not skipping stones and similar actions are candidates for being weakly justified, depends on whether they are envisaged as appealing or are merely secondary activities.

7. Bases of evaluation

My claim is that actions are weakly justified in so far as a rational individual would endorse the motivation, or the propension to such acts, if he subjected them to evaluation. This paper will conclude with two ways one might argue for this kind of reflective endorsement. Both make use of the idea of propensions. One is Grice's. In *Method in Philosophical Psychology*, Grice made use of a fiction, a genitor building more and more complex creatures, in order to introduce and then explain psychological concepts. He wished to apply this fiction once again in order to analyse justification and weak justification. Aspects of behaviour, or human traits, could be 'justified' if one could support two claims: first, that a (fictional) genitor interested in constructing self-maintaining individuals would build such dispositions or traits into the things created; second, that self-reflective humans would endorse these dispositions if they sub-

⁸ Careful examination of the expression 'acting on impulse' sharpens our own judgement; it confirms the insight that important distinctions are to be found in ordinary descriptions, that careful characterization can lead to a theoretical distinction. Grice noted that the 'voice' of impulse is one which appeals, rather than requires. This might seem at first glance merely impressionistic, or, at best, descriptive. But it is used to explain. During the Vietnam War, young American men at anti-war rallies burned their draft cards. Grice thought such actions could not in general be classified as acting on impulse. The individuals represented their actions to themselves as obligatory. They were influenced by argument, or, some sceptics might say, their activity was 'engineered' by rhetoric.

jected them to evaluation,⁹ taking an evaluative stance analogous to the genitor's. In this paper, I will first present a seemingly more modest alternative and then pass to Grice's playful but very serious fiction.

Acting on a propensity is rational because, were an agent to reflect at some time regarding this disposition, she would endorse it. But what is the basis or what are plausible bases for their endorsement or evaluation? We might endorse some propensities, if we reflected on them, simply because we value being spontaneous. One wants to be free from routine or custom, to not be in a rut, to sometimes act in ways that are outside what is routine or expected. More positively expressed, one prizes being oneself, and this is characterized partly in terms of being spontaneous, partly in terms of responding to what one feels, and in serious matters, being true to one's feelings. Two considerations—individuality and liberty—meet here.

While a person's moral commitments are rightly thought of as central to who she is, feelings too are central. Being oneself is at least partly characterized in terms of acting on one's feelings and being spontaneous.

This justification may be thought too weak. Granted, one may plausibly argue that a rational being necessarily believes in her own worth.¹⁰ Self-worth is presupposed in deliberating, in seeking to determine what is worth one's time and energy. What one should prize about oneself is, however, contested. While it seems obviously true to me, and I hope it is plausible to readers, that a rational agent prizes her individuality and liberty, there is disagreement with regard to both. Individuality has been thought an over-praised liberal value, and liberty, as I understand it, requires an area open to spontaneous activity, and not merely one set aside by morality.¹¹

⁹ Grice thought that if a propensity was significant in human flourishing, it was one we ought to have. Here, as elsewhere, he was thinking in terms of creature-construction. He asked: what psychological traits or dispositions would one build into a creature who was meant to flourish? This viewpoint of a creator or 'genitor' (a word close enough to 'janitor' to appeal to Grice) is one that a reflective individual can adopt in so far as she aims to retain or modify those aspects of herself she can change. In introducing the notion of a propensity, Grice theorized that a more, or relatively, primitive activity has survived in humans, which continues to guide action. There is, on top of this, a rational capacity of acting on principles.

¹⁰ Compare Kant's arguments for the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative. Kant argues in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (429) that we should always treat people as ends and not means only, because rational nature exists as an end in itself; he claims that this principle is supported by the necessity of individuals to regard their own existence in this way.

¹¹ Barbara Herman (1993), offers an admirably subtle Kantian account of the way in which moral principles leave room for other motives. A remaining dissatisfaction may perhaps be better put in Platonic, rather than Kantian terminology: a rational agent is someone whose feelings are in line with her evaluations. But it matters that the relation goes both ways, that there are two speaking parts. I want to allow for the voice of feelings, and argue for a democratic committee in the soul.

A second basis for the endorsement of another group of propensions may be found in the principle of self-trust. It is arguable that the rational formation of beliefs as well as rational action presupposes such a principle. The thought-transitions of practical reasoning such as 'That route looks dangerous, I am turning back', and their theoretical counterparts remain subject to demands for evidence and proof. A critical stance necessarily plays a part in the acceptance of rational beliefs; but it must presuppose reliance on one's own judgement.

This is a patchwork kind of justification, admittedly sketchy, and subject to disagreement, but still relatively modest with respect to assumptions. Grice offered a more powerful but also more difficult account. Its acceptance requires that one can meet the strong objections to naturalism that are now familiar. I understand by naturalism any attempt to understand what is good by reference to what is normal for a species. Objectors claim: this commits the naturalistic fallacy, or tries to derive an ought from an is, or introduces something foreign, in particular something 'biological' into ethical theory.¹²

Grice thought that propensions are justified in so far as it is good for creatures like us to be equipped with them. He also thought that rational reflection on our propensions would refer to what is good for creatures like us. Both ideas need to be supported. The genitorial story of creature construction is obviously a colourful myth about the development of species in terms of what makes them flourish. Applied to an individual's justification of actions, it has both the advantages and disadvantages of naturalism. While I cannot here seriously explore the merits of naturalism, I want to present the more obvious advantages of Grice's approach. I will also try to respond to some of the more evident objections.¹³

Grice can easily find justifications for those propensions that serve the security of the species. From the point of view of the construction of ever more complex creatures, one sees the effective association of those elements needed for a creature's survival with feelings of pleasure, and those that are harmful or dangerous with pain. Importantly, natural expressions of emotion may well have evolved to maintain those social arrangements that humans need as a species. Surprisingly, even sophisticated reflections on liberty and individuality can be seen to play a part in human well-being. Grice's approach can be used to find a supporting argument for these values. At first sight, endorsement of individuality and liberty seems far from the evaluation embedded in the

¹² See Thompson (1995), p. 251.

¹³ Grice did not propose the specific genitorial or individual justifications of propensions that I discuss, nor the possible criticisms of justification in terms of creature-construction.

Gricean story. But Grice's genitor might argue in the following way. A rational individual who prizes her individuality and liberty will flourish. From the genitorial or creature-construction viewpoint, humans have flourished by adopting standards, principles, and rules to guide action; but they are also the kind of creature that does well when acting not only on the basis of rules—even rules of its own making. Inventiveness, independence, a strong sense of self and self-worth make for more persevering and more successful creatures. Human beings flourish not only when there is space for non-rule-governed behaviour, but also when they prize and take pride in themselves as unique individuals.

This may be a plausible line to take, but Grice's claim, that a rational individual takes a stance that is analogous to the genitor's, faces familiar objections.¹⁴ A reflective individual may accept this quasi-historical understanding of what is human, and judge that to a large extent this remains her received psychological nature. But it is not evident that she need, qua rational, endorse all of the same judgements as the genitor. That is, it is not evident that a rational individual would take the position of the genitor in reflecting on which of her present motivations to preserve or maintain. This is the familiar criticism: a rational individual does not, as such, act for, or endorse, what is good for her species, or group. McDowell's (1995) story of the rational wolf is a powerful example of this objection: the rational wolf knows what is good for wolves, in particular, cooperation in hunting, but as rational he can see that if others do the work, he need not do it himself. Although he is aware of his wolfish nature, he is also a rational creature. McDowell anticipates an objection that the wolf cannot recognize what is true about wolves, and so about himself, and yet, as rational, reject some of those generalizations, those that conflict with his own rational principle of self-interest. McDowell refers to the logical nature of the situation. The rational wolf may still consider itself a wolf, even if it does not cooperate in hunting as wolves in general do, because truths about wolfish nature, just as truths about human nature, take the form of 'Aristotelian categorical'.¹⁵ An Aristotelian categorical such as 'Humans have thirty-two teeth' does not imply that a particular human has thirty-two teeth.

This may not, however, be an objection to the Gricean justification of propensions. First, the propensions in question are not those of a

¹⁴I assume for this paper that reflection on propensions, as part of practical thinking, has as its aim determining what is the good life. What this paper takes as problematic is Grice's claim that the agent thinks in terms of what is good for creatures like herself.

¹⁵McDowell (1995, p. 153) refers to what Michael Thompson (1995, p. 281) calls an Aristotelian categorical.

merely human creature, but of one who is both human and rational. There is no presumption of conflict, although conflicts arise. One might say that there is a *presumption* that the inference from an Aristotelian categorical goes through. It is, at least, a good regulative principle for practical reason to begin with. It is rational for the individual looking for justification of her dispositions to start by taking the genitorial stance. One needs some reason or evidence for judging that one is not like other members of one's (both rational and human) kind. In the relevant case, some reason to think that, in so far as one allows oneself to be spontaneous, one will not flourish. The genitorial justification of propensions is not weakened by the possibility of specific conditions or personal traits blocking the inference. That possibility is foreseen, since weak justifications typically give way to reasons, to strong ones, to considerations of personal interest as well as moral principles.

We may, for example, justify preserving those propensions articulated in terms of responses to what looks dangerous or scary, as part of our prudential inheritance, unless we have reason to think there are relevant differences in our own case. One could not in this way defend moral reasons. But an appeal to what is good for the species and, without special argument for us too, might be used to justify propensions that play a part in the formation and acceptance of moral principles, such as the natural expressions of gratitude. In the sketchiest of outlines: human beings need, enjoy, and value certain relations with others. Those emotional dispositions that promote such relations will have a justification, unless there is reason for the agent to find herself an exception.

8. Conclusion

The concept of rationality allows for, and may demand, a wider scope than most philosophers acknowledge, because there is a significant group of actions that are not motivated by reasons, but which are, none the less, rational.

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