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Philosophy as Theory of Reason

Abstract

In the following I argue that we should understand philosophy, at least modern philosophy as a theory of reason. It systematizes our lifeworld practice of giving and taking reasons. Ethics as a general philosophical subdiscipline systematizes our lifeworld moral reasoning. Philosophy of science systematizes reasoning in the natural sciences. Modern philosophy is to a large extent a meta-discipline at first sight. At second sight, however, the differentiation between *meta* and *object* disappears, since reasoning of all kinds is self-reflective. Insofar philosophical reasoning is a prolongation or extension of lifeworld and disciplinary reasoning. The borders between philosophy and the other sciences and reasoning-practices are not sharp and clear-cut, but fuzzy and permeable.

I am going to discuss this meta-philosophical thesis in five parts. The first, programmatic, part sets the stage and explains what is meant by this thesis; The second discusses the concept of reason; The third the relation between truth and justification; The fourth argues that there is not much of a difference between theoretical and practical reasons and the last part embeds reasons into the form of human life (*Lebensform* in a Wittgensteinean understanding).

This paper pleas for a specific understanding of philosophy in general, but its arguments have a special impact on how we understand philosophical ethics, it is a contribution to meta-ethics.

1. Philosophy as Theory of Reason

I propose that we should understand philosophy as *theory of reason*. I do not claim by any means that all philosophical activity can be subsumed under the idea of theory of reason. I believe, however, that the heart of philosophical activity aims at clarifying what qualifies beliefs and actions as reasonable. More specifically: I believe there are good reasons why modern

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philosophy should perceive itself as theory of reason, after its most successful sub-disciplines have become independent scientific endeavors.

Physics, originating in philosophy, challenged philosophy's identity as early as the 18th century. We can read Immanuel Kant, turning away from the German rationalist school philosophy, and developing a critique of theoretical reason as a genuine philosophical project, as an attempt to clarify the transcendental conditions for empirical natural science. If human knowledge was impossible to achieve through *rationalism*, that is, based on truths of reason, the only available alternative was a more modest form of philosophical knowledge which Kant described as the *synthetic a priori*: In contrast to the natural sciences and the social sciences, which became sciences in their own right only in the 20th century, philosophy remained an *a priori* discipline, albeit with a quite modest goal. Philosophy focused exclusively on elucidating the conditions for empirical knowledge as the subject matter of philosophical epistemology, as well as the conditions for a reasonable practice as the subject matter of ethics: *critique of theoretical and practical reason*. If this project failed too, philosophy would lose its subject matter for good. As a last resort, it would have to limit itself to a skeptical critique of reason à la David Hume or seek its *raison d'être* in a highly metaphysical theory of the absolute spirit (G. W. F. Hegel).

Quine's criticism of empiricist dogmas marks the advent of philosophy's crisis. Things worsen during the 1970s with the comeback of normative ethics and political philosophy, which Ayer – in his *Language, Truth and Logic*[1] – had excluded in the strongest terms from the traditional analytical program. John Rawls, one of the most influential representatives of American political philosophy for decades, breaks with this aspect of analytical tradition: His *Theory of Justice* did not continue the discourse on analytical ethics, but rather developed – with a few references to the *rational choice* paradigm – a social contract theory based on the tradition of European enlightenment.

The methodical approach of Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, which he had outlined in his previous essay *A Decision Procedure for Ethics*, points in the right direction. The turn to Kantian constructivism, however, and in particular the transcendentalist version by Korsgaard, can only be interpreted as a setback for the project of a self-confident and crisis-resistant philosophy. I assume this turn was motivated by the urgent desire to somehow align philosophy with naturalism as the only remaining dogma of analytical philosophy. Another motivation might have been the worry that systematic normative political philosophy has self-enforcing tenden-

[1] Alfred J. Ayer: *Language, Truth and Logic*, London: Penguin Books 2001.

cies and will therefore, with a certain logical necessity, result in some form of *non-naturalist normative realism.* This form of realism was indeed championed for example by Thomas Nagel or Ronald Dworkin, both having an approach quite similar to Rawls, as well as by Thomas Scanlon, a former student of Rawls at Harvard University. However, a non-naturalist ethical realism – allegedly implicated in mysticism and Platonism – seems to be absolutely unacceptable for the analytical mainstream, especially in the US and Great Britain.

My aim is to banish this specter of Platonism, which seems to be lurking behind every form of non-naturalist ethical realism. However, if Platonism refers to the thesis that non-physical objects are real, any criticism of Platonism results in the immunization of naturalist metaphysics. And since the naturalist doctrine obviously faces massive, insuperable problems, naturalism's immunization would spell the end of philosophy – a long-held dream of many naturalists come true: philosophy's integration into the natural sciences.

There are three major obstacles to this dream becoming true:

(1) logic

(2) normativity

(3) subjectivity.

(1) There is no empirical proof of the validity of logical rules, logic is not a possible part of natural science.

(2) The normative might supervene on the non-normative. It cannot, however, be reduced to it: It is impossible to deduce a normative dimension from empirical facts or to transpose normative claims to empirical claims without any loss of meaning.

(3) Even if all subjective states have corresponding neuro-physiological realizations, they are not identical with these realizations. This has been shown by the recent qualia debate.

Philosophy, as theory of theoretical as well as practical reason, is neither a rationalist project, nor a reconstruction of meaning and practice in their entirety, and lastly not an answer to global skepticism. The theory of reason aligns with our lifeworld beliefs, which represent the theory's inescapable *justificatory benchmark*. This does not, however, make philosophy an uncritical, merely reconstructive project. Systematization and conceptual analysis of our beliefs and practices, debating the criteria and norms guiding these beliefs and practices is not *l'art pour l'art*, not a thought experiment only relevant for those working in philosophy and academia. It is an attempt for greater clarity and coherence, motivated by the observation of confusion and inconsistencies.

Philosophy as theory of reason aims at continuity with lifeworld discourses via which philosophy exerts influence on the practice of our lifeform. Being continuous with the methods of natural and social sciences, it is not

an alternative form of thinking. It does not oppose the methods and results of individual disciplines but merges them into a coherent worldview.

In some cases, philosophy as theory of reason must champion and defend lifeworld beliefs and practices against scientistic exaggeration and extravagance – it must take the side of lifeworld reason, as it were. This is, however, not a criticism of science and academia but a criticism of philosophy accepting unfounded and ideological, worldview-driven conclusions based on results from natural sciences.

What remains is a practical philosophy with a terminology and approach to theory construction that ties in with and systematizes our shared practice of normative judgement. It derives its normative content from the reasons we give to justify our normative beliefs, actions, and emotive attitudes. Shared reasons, which are deemed indisputable, serve as a – of course always provisional – justificatory benchmark. We review and assess controversial normative beliefs and practices with reference to what, *between us,* are undisputed beliefs and practices.

2. On the Concept of Reason

Since Immanuel Kant it has become commonplace in philosophy to distinguish between *a priori* as that which is given before all experience and *a posteriori* as that which is given after experience. In this context, experience is defined as empirical experience. After analytical philosophy abolished the *synthetic a priori* at the beginning of the 20th century, this distinction survived in form of a trimmed-down version as the distinction between mathematical logic (and mathematics) one the one side and empirical experience, i.e., natural science (and social science) on the other. The *a priori* is reduced to formal logic, the *a posteriori* to knowledge generated by the natural and social sciences. The ongoing development of philosophy of science, however, quickly revealed many problems connected with this distinction. The probably most far-reaching reaction to these problems was to abandon the distinction altogether, to identify the synthetic with the empirical and to bury the analytical, as it were, as the naturalistic analytical philosopher Quine[2] did.

Now, if I claim that there can be no aprioristic theory of reason, I use this distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* in a more fundamental and, I believe, less problematic way. A theory of reason would be *a priori* if it abstracted from the practice of the use of reason, that is, the practice of giving and taking reasons. Many see formal logic as an

[2] Cf. Willard V. O. Quine: *Word and Object*, Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press 1975.

aprioristic discipline in this sense: It is independent of the established practice of logical reasoning.

My thesis is this: Philosophy as theory of reason is an *a posteriori* discipline. It generalizes and systematizes our everyday political, economic and scientific use of reason. Philosophy as theory of reason is involved in the everyday practice of giving and taking reasons and operates as well as develops within the context of this practice.

This does not, however, make philosophy an empirical discipline. It is not an *a posteriori* discipline in the empirical sense. For the use of reason in everyday life is itself normative: It assesses a belief based on whether there are good reasons for holding this belief. The practice of giving and taking reasons is inherently normative because reasons speak in favor of beliefs, actions and emotive attitudes, and the contents of justification, i.e., propositions, which are neither physical nor mental objects. Philosophy as theory of reason is not an empirical discipline; it does not describe how people deliberate, it is itself a form of deliberation; it has normative and objective content.

The idea of deliberative practices disintegrating into individual parts, as it is sometimes suggested by Wittgenstein's language game metaphor and postmodern conceptions of our epistemic situation, is misguided. Our entire deliberative practice ultimately forms one entity and philosophy is merely a part of that practice. Philosophy does cover particularly fundamental and general aspects of that practice, but it is not excluded from it. There is a continuum between philosophy, the sciences, and our lifeworld; the epistemic network does not come in partitioned form.

The logical realm of objectively good reasons impacts the mental and physical world through our ability to deliberate and by affecting our beliefs, actions, and emotive attitudes. Human reason is nothing other than the capacity for deliberation and the willingness to be influenced by its results.

The philosophical perspective is not detached, not from outside. A sufficiently distant point of view would turn the observed phenomena of cultural practices into completely meaningless mere spatial-temporal processes. If philosophers were no longer participants, we would be inapt to understand reasoning practices. Shared intentions, participation in the practice of attributing emotive states to others, joint outrage in the face of injustice, the all too familiar concern for one's own good life that we recognize in others as well, are a necessary condition to understand cultural practices. Philosophy's distancing from our lifeworld is somewhat pathological: It denies the obvious and tries to cut ties that are indestructible. Such a form of philosophy assumes that it can disregard empirical and normative beliefs that are in fact constitutive for any perspective that is meaningful to us. Such a

philosophical approach, would, ultimately, destroy all of philosophy's justificatory benchmarks.

3. Truth and Justification

In the dialogue *Theaetetus*, Plato's Socrates characterized knowledge as justified true belief. He refuted all subjectivist competitors the most significant of which appear in the dialogue. We are thoroughly acquainted with them from Marxist and poststructuralist contexts. The detailed dialogue ends with the cryptic statement by Socrates that one cannot yet be truly satisfied with the outcome. Admirers of Plato assume that Edmund Gettier's argument in a short article titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"[3] about 2500 years later, was already known or anticipated by Plato: the two conditions, the *truth of belief* and its *justification*, are not yet sufficient to constitute knowledge; for there has to be a suitable connection between the fact in question and the respective justification in order to speak of "knowledge". The Gettier challenge, even though it is half a century old, has not really been resolved up until the present day. A *causal theory* of knowledge does not provide an adequate answer to this challenge. For it is reasons that constitute our knowledge and reasons cannot be causes in the scientific sense.

My argument for overcoming this schism has as its starting point the connection between truth and justification: truth can only be understood in an objectivistic way, while justification must be related to the respective epistemic conditions of the justification. In the 12th century, the geocentric interpretation was justified but false. Thus, people only *believed* to know that they lived in a geocentric world, but since they were wrong, it was a mistaken belief: they did not *know* it. Alternatively, we can say that the geocentric belief was rational, but false. Not every erroneous belief is irrational. Rational beliefs do not necessarily constitute knowledge. True beliefs can be irrational.

I advocate a realistic interpretation of justifying discourses and consider myself an epistemic optimist: I assume that by exchanging reasons we, usually, are getting closer to the truth. This *epistemic optimism,* however, must not be elevated into a *definition of truth*, according to which ideal justification *constitutes* truth, according to which truth is nothing more than ideal justifiability. A realist could even – unreasonably – postulate that ideal justifications are those which exclusively justify true beliefs,

[3] Cf. Edmund Gettier: "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis* 23 (1963) 121-123.

but this would explicate the (ideal) concept of justification via a non-epistemic, realistic concept of truth and not vice versa.

We should not commingle truth and justification as the two criteria of knowledge. Neither by subsuming truth under justification, as is done by different types of epistemic truth definitions, varying from postmodern, relativistic, subjectivist to internalist and cognitivist types, nor should we conceptually bind justification to truth. *The schism cannot be resolved in the form of a fusion of truth and justification.*

Successful justifications resolve doubts or alleviate them. In dialogue, the uncertainties that prompt a need for justification differ: one person may find something doubtful that another person does not. Or they differ in the degree of epistemic uncertainty, in the degree of doubt: One person considers something to be highly certain, the other has certain doubts, but is still more inclined to assume that the position is correct, rather than not. In dialogue, a successful justification is characterized by the fact that common propositions, which are not doubted by any of the two participants, are used to eliminate the epistemic difference with regard to the propositions in question. In addition to the propositions not doubted by any of the two participants, which are used for the justifying argument, the shared background knowledge and the shared inferential practice play a constitutive role for successful justifications: This accounts for successful justifications, the fact that they ultimately eliminate an epistemic difference – based on shared background knowledge (shared propositional attitudes) and a shared inferential practice. Justifications are successful against a *shared background*, which includes not only empirical, but also mental, especially intentional, evaluative and normative, as well as inferential elements.

In pleading for a consistent epistemic perspective, I mean precisely this: being consistent is dealing carefully with the context in which all reasoning takes place, and avoiding philosophical hybris. In order to be able to doubt something, there must be many things that are indubitable. If we want to remove doubt, we cannot remove ourselves from the context of the indubitable. The consistently epistemic perspective always remains within our shared world of experience.

The consistently epistemic perspective does not permit the reconstruction of the inferential framework of our lifeform. We cannot postulate how reasons should be brought forward, because we have always been part of the game of giving and taking reasons. The entire process of culturalization and socialization is based on this ability to deliberate. We are not conditioned for certain practices, but rather, we are enabled to a deliberative practice that guides our actions and judgements.

Philosophical doubt that goes beyond that which can reasonably be doubted is dubious. It is an intellectual game that, if taken seriously, has

destructive consequences for theoretical as well as practical reason. Rationalism and (global) skepticism are brothers in spirit. Contemporary postmodern skepticism and early modern rationalism are two different philosophical attitudes, but they have one thing in common: the abandonment of the epistemic perspective. In one case, knowledge is secured through supposedly unquestionable deductions from unquestionable axioms. In the other case, we abandon both constitutive elements of knowledge – correspondence with facts and being well justified.

Reasons do not only play a theoretical but also a practical role. They do not only change our epistemic attitudes but also our practice; they motivate us, reasons *speak for* beliefs and actions (among other things), *reasons are always both normative and inferential*. Reasons create a connection between facts (of which we are convinced) and assumptions that something is or will be the case (theoretical, empirical, descriptive reasons), or between facts and actions (normative reasons), between facts and evaluations (evaluative reasons), and between facts and emotions (emotive reasons). However, these categories of reasons must not obscure the dual dimension, inferential and normative, of reasons in all categories.

4. Theoretical vs. Practical Reason

The previous section argued in favor of a realistic understanding of truth. This understanding has, for the realm of theoretical reasons at least, received increasing support in contemporary philosophy, and especially in the natural sciences. When it comes to the realm of practical reasons, however, it is rejected, especially in the field of ethics.[4]

John Mackie is the first to bury the program of ethical subjectivism of analytic provenance. At the same time, he renews it in a seemingly paradoxical combination: He claims that the entire *ordinary language* moral philosophy, i.e. the analytical metaethics from Ayer to Stevenson to Hare, was taken in by a fundamental – linguistic – error: The only interpretation of moral language must be objectivist, not subjectivist as analytical philosophers have argued for decades. This means that the moral language, or broadly speaking the moral communication practice of our lifeworld, is shaped by a fundamental (epistemological) error, ac-

[4] One phenomenon of this development is a "new realism", which is not only discussed in philosophy, but also in the humanities and cultural sciences, see Maurizio Ferraris: *Manifesto of New Realism*, translated by Sarah De Sanctis, New York: State University of New York Press 2015; Marcus Gabriel (Ed.): *Der neue Realismus*. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2014 and REAL.

cording to which it is actually about the clarification of factual questions. Analytical meta-ethicists have attempted a subjectivist interpretation of spoken moral language which is in accordance with their metaphysical, especially ontological, prejudices. Mackie, however, realizes the futility of these attempts and returns to two familiar arguments in favor of an ethical skepticism (of second order), *the argument from relativity* (the factual (cultural) relativity of moral beliefs) and *the argument from queerness* (the ontological peculiarity of moral properties).

Ethical skepticism and subjectivism are now presented as a (plausible) metaphysics and not as the result of language analysis. Half a century of analytical ethics is rendered radically void and the analysis of *ordinary language* is replaced by a (rather thetic) metaphysics, according to which there are no normative facts. From an epistemological and ontological perspective, we must remain subjectivists. Morality is merely an instrument for achieving certain goals, and since the instrumental rationality of rules and institutions can be rationally clarified, a second-order subjectivism (a subjectivist metaethics) can be combined with a first-order objectivism (an objectivist theory of normative ethics) in this way. More sensitive natures such as Bertrand Russell have not been able to endure this kind of tension throughout their lives, and Mackie merely dissipates this tension with a philosophical sleight of hand.[5]

Each anti-realist ethical conception is ultimately unconvincing for the simple reason that our normative discourses seek to clarify what obligations we do in fact hold. The division between theoretical reason, which is directed towards rational beliefs, and practical reason, which is ultimately only an expression of individual desires, is not convincing. An ethical judgment is to be treated like other judgments, and an ethical theory like other theories: They prove themselves against that which is not in question: certain concrete or general normative facts, invariances, inferences, ethical background knowledge, the great web that is generated through the normative communication practice, and the lifeworld exchange of normative reasons.

Only global moral skepticism in one form or another would provide a certain plausibility to the leaps towards reduction (ethical naturalism) and construction (radical constructivism and Kantian constructivism). Yet there is no reason for fundamental moral skepticism: the practices of communication work quite well, not only within a society, but also internationally, we understand very well what it means that someone ought to do something, that someone has violated their duty, that a certain practice is inhumane, etc., even if we differ with regards to the criteria.

[5] Cf. John Mackie: *Ethics*: *Inventing Right and Wrong*, London: Penguin Books 1990 [1977].

We want to know what is right and what is wrong. It is for this reason that we weigh practical and evaluative reasons. The uncertainties, dilemmas and the cluelessness are great enough to provide ever more fuel for the *game of giving and taking reasons*. We play this game because we are epistemic optimists, because we hope that we can resolve normative errors through deliberation. Our lifeform is a deliberative one, it is not possible without evaluating theoretical and practical reasons. Indeed, deliberation is *constitutive* for its two central concepts, that of a belief and that of an action: A *belief* is an opinion for which the person who holds it can give reasons. An *action* is a behavior for which the acting individual can give reasons. The reasons refer to a practical and theoretical background, which is unquestionable and self-evident, such that we cannot give reasons for it without falling out of the shared lifeform. This shared lifeform does not offer a starting point for the separation of theoretical and practical reason. The robust realism of our lifeform is comprehensive, it cannot be bisected, it cannot be limited to theoretical reason.

5. Reasons in the Lifeworld

In philosophy, there is broad consensus that reasons are related to established rules; in other words, that the primary role of reasons is interpersonal. This is not to say that in most cases, we cannot communicate with others in the practice of justified beliefs and actions without any dialogue. Person A gives person B a reason for x – an action, a belief, a (non-propositional) attitude. A good reason for x is convincing. If A gives a good reason for x to B and if B is sufficiently rational, B believes x after having considered that reason. Does this apply – regardless of the category to which x belongs? Yes, it seems to me that B then believes that the action, the belief, the attitude is right. If we want to let go of the arguably circular determination of "rational", we can insert the concept of a *pragmatically* good reason: R is a (pragmatically) good reason for x relative to B, if B can be convinced by R that x is correct. Yet, we must be able to assume that the reason-giving A believes R, i.e., they assume that R describes an *accurate (descriptive or normative) fact* and that R *actually* speaks for x, i.e., that it is an (objectively) good reason for x. Whether something is a good reason depends – outside the realm of science and philosophy at least – on the established rules of our lifeworld justification games.

We can assume that we grasp the concept of reason – or should we say: the lifeworld phenomenon of giving and taking reasons – through certain utterance situations. Someone expresses a belief and is asked why they hold this belief. The answers they provide to these questions give (subjective) reasons for the belief, that is, they name beliefs on their part, that justify

the belief in question. An expression that justifies a belief consists in turn of an expression of beliefs. As such, speaking of "subjective" reasons is by no means harmless, indeed it may suggest that the justification game has its conclusion in the opinions of the person concerned. A justification is only successful when 1) there is an agreement with the person who provides the justification; 2) the person who takes the justification is defined; 3) an agreement regarding the existence of the facts on which the justification is based is established. In this sense, that is, with regards to their propositional content, reasons are always objective and never subjective.

This objectivistic reading allows for setting a limit to the interpersonal character of the justification game. If a person believes that a certain fact exists that justifies one of their beliefs, and at the same time, they believe that this fact is only accessible to them, not to anyone else, then they can – justifiably – believe that they have good reasons. At the same time, this person can believe that they cannot communicate these good reasons to B or to anyone else and that this means that stating these reasons would not lead to the respective addressee's belief of the given justification, i.e., the justification being successful. Nonetheless, this objectivistic reading does not deny that the game of giving and taking reasons is appropriated by the (interpersonal) practice of expression. In this sense one can continue to speak of a primacy of reasons as interpersonal relations.

Prohairetic and epistemic systems are not only inseparably linked, they are also subject to comparable coherence conditions. Although one may speak of the justification of actions, it is less misleading to speak of the justification of normative beliefs which guide the action. An expectation is a (probabilistic) belief which is fulfilled by the occurrence of the event in question. I often form my expectations as the result of a deliberation process, which can likewise incorporate scientific theories and data and thus arrive at a specific expectation. The role of decisions is similar. Decisions complete the weighing of pro and contra and are fulfilled by a certain type of event: expectations and decisions conclude deliberation processes; they are the result of theoretical or practical deliberations.

An expectation can be characterized as a belief that something will happen (possibly with a certain probability). A decision can be characterized as an expression of a belief that the action, which fulfills the decision, is the right one. In the spirit of the Stoa, I wish to go one step further and interpret decisions not merely as an *expression* of normative beliefs, but as a normative statement itself, as a judgment. We ascribe beliefs even when they must be accepted in order to interpret the behavior of the respective person as rational.

Decisions are expressions of both: normative and prohairetic judgements. Not every normative judgement is also prohairetic, for example when its dimension of action is unclear. Decisions are thus normative

judgements of a certain type: judgments that go hand in hand with a desire to act. They are therefore both normative and prohairetic. Even if they do not have the character of a judgement, we ascribe expectations. Yet an essential part of our expectations concludes a – theoretical – deliberation and, thus, they do have the character of a judgement. Descriptive and normative judgements thus stand opposite each other and take the form of expressions of descriptive or normative beliefs, of which the individual is aware, and which conclude the – theoretical or practical – deliberations (temporarily). If these judgments are sufficiently stable elements of the epistemic system, we may also say that these judgments, as stable beliefs, are propositional attitudes of the individual concerned. As propositional attitudes, decisions are a hybrid, they are both epistemic and prohairetic.

The deliberation process preceding the *expectations* is about probabilistic and non-probabilistic facts, or in any case with descriptive facts. The deliberation process preceding *decisions* is about normative and descriptive facts: What is the right action, what should I do in this situation? What are the reasons in favor of this action in contrast to other possible actions? Thus, both cases concern beliefs. Normative beliefs remain beliefs, they do not secretly turn into desires over the course of such a deliberation process.

Even where reasons for action refer to one's own interests, this happens *qualitatively*, in a sense that we will have yet to explain. It is not the existence of interests as such that provides good reasons for action. By this I do not mean the venerable and philosophically much discussed problem of the qualification of one's own interests, in the sense of worthy and unworthy interests.[6] For this only concerns a special aspect of an evaluative judgement. Something else is more decisive: reasons always lead to a categorical conclusion (this is not solely the case in the moral context as Immanuel Kant claimed): They justify a belief or an action or an emotive attitude *categorically*, not merely hypothetically (under the hypothesis of these or those goals of the respective agent). They justify a belief or an action as rational. A *hypothetical* justification, as it is occasionally called, does not qualify as a justification. "If you want X, then do Y" is not a justification for Y. This is merely the determination of a causal or probabilistic relation. This is not a justification for Y. It does not prove Y to be rational. Not even for the person who desires X. The attempt by Humeans, to identify all *practical* reasons as hypothetical, is incompatible

[6] From John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*, London 1863 to John C. Harsanyi: *Rational Behavior and Bargaining Equilibrium in Games and Social Situations*, Cambridge: University Press 1977: anti-social interests in the utilitarian calculation are excluded as unworthy of consideration. Alternatively, they distinguish between higher and lower needs.

with the role of practical reasons in the lifeworld. Hypothetical justifications either indicate the failure of a reason, or are merely building blocks of a reason that is yet to be given. "If you are convinced that dolphins are fish, you should also assume that they lay eggs." This, of course, is not a justification for believing that dolphins lay eggs.

There is a gap between preferences and actions. It is a naive idea of human rationality, in a dual sense, to believe that action expresses one's dominating desires (or should we speak of resulting desires, in line with physics) or, in the terminology of rational decision theory, that it is nothing other than a *revealed preference*. Action is the result of an assessing, evaluative judgement. I act in a certain way because I consider this action to be the right one. The ability to distance oneself from one's own interests – and the complexes of desires that constitute them – is an essential characteristic of a rational person.

If the predicate "rational" in practical contexts meant nothing else than "it is a suitable means for the given purpose" (or to put it more strongly: "there is nothing more suitable"), then rationality would lose its normative significance. The designation of an action as "rational" would no longer have a recommendatory character, then the predication "it is rational" in practical contexts would only maintain a descriptive (probabilistic or causal) relation. As a normative predicate, it is subject to certain forms of justification. The justification for why an action is rational may refer to subjective characteristics like the individual's desires or interests, but it can only be understood objectively – like any justification – in that it distinguishes this action as the right action.

The normative constitution of our lifeworld practice of communication is overly complex. There are those rules whose observance constitutes an act of speech, and whose non-observance causes the corresponding act of speech to fail (*fallacy* in the Austinian sense). Violations of these rules occur frequently. Many promises are made with the intention of breaking them. If this intention remains hidden from the addressee, the speech act of the promise succeeds. Nevertheless, it is a serious violation of rules which leads to moral criticism if it is uncovered. This moral criticism occurs – almost – independently of how this act of the promise is otherwise morally evaluated. The moral criticism is tied to this type of speech act. This phenomenon poses some riddles for philosophical ethics. Modern theories of ethics develop more or less abstract criteria for a moral judgement, the most well-known of which are the different variants of utilitarian evaluation, Kantianism in the sense of a generalization test for maxims, intuitionist ethics in the style of David Ross[7] (according to

[7] Cf. W. D. Ross: *The Right and the Good*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1930.

which there are some basic rules of moral judgment that are not in need of justification, such as the duty to help, respect for individual rights, etc.)[8] as well as libertarian theories, which claim Locke's individual rights to be the sole basis of a moral judgment. None of the above-mentioned approaches to modern ethics offers an obvious interpretation for this phenomenon of our lifeworld linguistic practice.

One possible explanation would be to consider the normative constituents of our lifeworld linguistic practice to be ethically unfounded i.e., to claim that our lifeworld linguistic practice is indeed guided by normative intuitions of this kind, but that these intuitions lack a rational ethical foundation and, as such, do not entail any moral obligation. A second possible interpretation would be to see these normative constituents of our lifeworld linguistic practice as a first orientation for action, which could then be *rationally reconstructed*, modified or rejected by the ethical theory. We are, prima facie, obliged to keep our promises, but whether we are actually – not only prima facie – obliged to keep a promise is determined by the principle of the ethical theory.

It seems to me that both of these two dominant versions for determining the relation between ethical theory and lifeworld linguistic practice have almost bizarre practical consequences. The first version would be tantamount a complete devaluation of all the finely chiseled normative criteria of our lifeworld linguistic practice and would ultimately make the normative constituents of our lifeworld communication and interaction practice disappear. The ethical rational agent would no longer qualify as a partner for dialogue and interaction. Ethical rationalization would not only entail a comprehensive loss of morality; it would likewise forfeit its ability for practice. Those who take this ethical theory seriously and who are consistently oriented towards its principles and criteria, participate in the world of communication and interaction only in the form of a stage actor. They thereby simulate normative commitments, beliefs, and respective attitudes that make the commitments and beliefs seem true.

If taken seriously, the second version of the relationship between ethical theory and lifeworld practice would have bizarre consequences as well. All the rules that agents would follow would only be tentatively valid. Their conformity to the rules, which make them a reliable partner for dialogue and interaction in the first place, would, in a sense, always remain hypothetical. The ethical test could dispense with this conformity to the rules at any time. Moreover, if one looks at the spectrum of modern

[8] Tom Beauchamp and James Childress: *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001 have developed such an intuitionist foundation for medical ethics that is particularly popular in the medical profession.

ethical theories and their principles and criteria outlined above, it is not clear that they can justify the necessary high degree of conformity to the rules of lifeworld practice. In any case, this applies so long as one takes these tests seriously in each individual instance and does not shift to a cursory examination of entire rule systems.

The question is, then, what is the source of the normativity?[9] Is this source to be found in the construction of one's own person, as Kantian and postmodern constructivists think? Or is the actual source of normativity an ethical principle that we discover or invent? As ethical realists we believe that it can be discovered, as ethical subjectivists we believe that it must invented. If we can discover it, the question remains, with which method this would be possible? What cognitive faculty allows us to discover this principle? One possible answer, namely that all we need is logical competence, has already briefly been discussed and rejected above. In any case, the logic of moral language does not reveal this principle to us. Maybe we have a direct intuition that allows us to see this principle, analogous to our judgements of perception?

The double aporia suggests that the source of normativity is to be found in the lifeworld linguistic and interactive practice itself. It is not the externally introduced principle of ethics (externally with regard to the lifeworld) – whether it is realistically interpreted as a moral fact or interpreted in constructivist terms as a useful invention of the human mind. In our linguistic and interactive practice, to make a promise means *ipso facto* to make a commitment. In any case, from the perspective of a member of the linguistic and interactive community, the (descriptive) statement that A has made a promise to B, is at the same time also a (normative) statement that A has an obligation to B. One cannot make a promise without entering into obligations. Likewise, one cannot, at least as a member of the same linguistic and interactive community, establish the fact that someone has made a promise, without acknowledging this obligation. The ostensible naturalistic fallacy does not exist, since making a promise is nothing more than to make certain commitments under specific conditions. One source of normativity corresponds to the established linguistic and interactive practice, which contains the institution of making promises. These and other normative institutions of our linguistic and interactive practice are the actual sources of normativity.

The ethical analysis has its starting point in the moral conflicts of our lifeworld. It is therefore very tempting to leave the lifeworld dimen-

[9] Cf. Christine Korsgaard: *The Sources of Normativity,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996. Interesting historical studies can be found in Charles Taylor: *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press 1989.

sion behind and to move on to an ethical principle that does not allow for moral conflicts. Modern act utilitarianism, especially in the form of preference utilitarianism, is a prominent example thereof. This solution strategy to moral conflicts in the lifeworld, however, leads to a profound conflict with the normative rules of the lifeworld as a whole. In order to salvage the theory, the normative constitution of our lifeworld practice must therefore be abandoned. At the same time the theory loses its justificatory benchmark – or as it used to be called in logical empiricism: its verification. The theory loses its foundation in the lifeworld, it loses contact with the sources of normativity.

Ethical analysis also has an effect on the lifeworld practice. The Enlightenment project in modernity has a practical dimension; it does not leave the lifeworld practice untouched. Ethical analysis makes moral orientations disappear, some of which were deeply embedded in lifeworld practice, but cannot withstand ethical criticism. Chastity as a central moral norm for girls and young women has been disappearing for several decades now. This occurs, among other reasons, because it comes into conflict with other norms – such as the norm of equality between men and women, as well as an autonomous way of life for both male and female adults – and, because no deeper normative principle can be found to justify this traditional virtue.

The decisive argument against a Wittgensteinian quietism is what I would like to call the *unity of the lifeworld*. In the lifeworld practice we cannot be satisfied with playing different games time and again. We are not content to play chess at one time and Halma at another; to play football at one time, and mess around with mathematical proofs at another, to take the role of the parent, then that of the teacher, that of the pupil, that of the citizen, that of the employee, that of a club member … There is always the one individual who acts here, who fulfils these different roles and therefore has to ensure that their lifeform remains coherent as a whole.

The unity of the lifeworld has above all an interpersonal dimension. We communicate through our normative and descriptive orientations, we must agree on what exists and what does not, what is well-justified and what is not, and this unity cannot always be a game-specific unity. We know who won the game of chess when we know the rules and the course of the moves. The metaphor of the game is tempting: Could it not be the case, that it is a matter of these isolated games which we can simply pull out of the drawer and delve into this world where we play together and that is all there is to it?

The game metaphor is helpful to look at the complexity of the normative rules established in life. It is misleading, however, if it implies that lifeworld practice is nothing more than a set of game situations,

each with its own rules that are not interrelated. This distinguishes the game of chess from the lifewordly established games, that are not artificial and not invented. They are not isolated, i.e., do not constitute their own world. Their participants have a lasting relationship with each other, they define themselves through their role, through their normative orientations, through their goals, through their personal ties, through their life projects, through time. These are not dispensed with depending on the game one enters.

To stay with the Wittgensteinian game metaphor: We are playing one great game whose rules we cannot describe and make explicit, and which are likewise underdetermined to a high degree. We are playing *one* great game that is carried by *one* large complex of interconnected rules. We remain *one* and the same person even when we transition from one game to another. The participants in this one great game share two basic types of propositional attitudes: Descriptive and prohairetic. They share beliefs about what is the case and which objects exist, on which experiences one can rely and on which ones one cannot and they share normative attitudes about what to do (in certain situations) and what not to do, which values should guide us, and what constitutes the violation of a rule and what does not. These two basic types of propositional attitudes are inextricably linked, they do not divide the one great game into two individual great games – a practical and a theoretical game, a normative and a descriptive game.