

# Morality, Rationality and Impartiality

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## **Abstract:**

*Morality as somehow involving rationality and impartiality received classic expression in philosophy of Kant who frankly speaks of “rational and impartial spectator” in contemplating the universal law. The overall aim of this paper is to show (1) that the idea of morality implies rationality and this will be reached at in refuting the moral scepticism; but (2) it does not necessarily indicate impartiality, since the justification of the principle of impartiality does not solve the problem of justifying particular moral principles. I will start with the question “Why should we be moral?” and then turn to moral rationality to refute moral scepticism, finally the relationship between rational morality and the principle of impartiality will be reconsidered.*

**Keywords:** *morality, rationality, impartiality, moral justification.*

## **I. The Idea of Morality**

Consider a person who has discovered a quick and sure way of getting rich. The prospects are great and he is tempted. Yet his conscience says “No, not that way”. He ignores his conscience. But he is prepared to reason with himself. He possesses the common knowledge of right and wrong. He sees that the way of getting rich he is contemplating is morally wrong. And yet his judging it as morally wrong, by itself, does not provide him with a reason for refraining from pursuing it. Perhaps he is not already committed to living a moral life. He sees the moral point of view but he does not actually look at the world from a moral point of view.

It will be an imposition upon him, I think, if we thought that his moral views nevertheless are simply those which ultimately manifest, or regularly show in his practical decisions. (Gert 2005; Gert, 1998)

Since he is clearly wondering why one should live a moral life at all. Why should he do what he himself sees as morally right?

If morality provided the only way of deciding between right and wrong, then, perhaps there will be some point in saying that a reasonable being should normally do what he sees as right. But there are ways other than moral of judging what is right or wrong. Why should one commit oneself to morality? This question about the justification of morality has puzzled philosophers ever since the time of Plato, although since the time of Prichard's *Moral Obligations* (1949), the search for an answer seems to have faded away. To the older philosophers the question itself was quite meaningful. (Tännsjö 1990; ch. 1)

Their problem was mainly how morality in the end could be shown to be to one's own advantage. They said, in general terms, what seems natural to say, that one should be moral because that is the way to get on with people. And getting on with people is important because as a member of a human community, happy and successful living requires that one should respect others and their rights, even though at times one is tempted to be ruthless and aggressively self-seeking; or, even better, that God takes morality seriously and although He seems to be a utilitarian in this world, He is most probably a retributivist in the other. What they said was essentially a prudential justification. This kind of justification, however, is thought to be ultimately unsatisfactory for various reasons. One obvious difficulty was to convince a person who believed that it is important to get on with others, but disbelieved that very often he could not get on with others and also get away with damaging their interests. If he were frequently successful in putting on masks and deceiving people in such a way that they did not even realize that they were deceived, he would see no reason to stick to morality. A person who says that he listens to the voice of prudence but not to that of conscience has, I think, to be taken seriously if he is prepared to reason about his position. And this he is, if he raises the question "Why should I be moral?" However, many philosophers have felt that a lot of moral philosophy rested on just this mistake; the older philosophy took the moral sceptic seriously. They think that the sceptic's demand for a justification of morality is itself unjustified. It is suggested that ultimately there are only two types of reasons that can be given when one is required to justify

his conduct, A) prudential reason in terms of self-interest, and B) moral reason. Now, the question “Why should I be moral?” cannot be interpreted as “Is being moral in my own interest?” since, as Hume observed, if the question “Is this right?” were the same question as “What is this to be?” it would seem very strange that this quite distinct way of speaking has emerged. Thus the sceptic’s question cannot be about his own interest nor can it be interpreted, for obvious reasons, as “Is there a moral reason for my being moral?” But, it is argued, if there are these two types of reason, the sceptic’s question itself must be illegitimate. (Bair 1995, 303 ff; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006; Superson 2009)

Now I do not think that this type of argument is successful; mainly, because *prima facie*, it does not seem to be true that there are only these two types of reason that could be given to justify conduct. There certainly seem to be other types of reason; for instance, religious reason, in terms of a loving obedience to God. And I take it, without arguing for it, that it is to the essence of acting truly on religious reasons, that one should not ask why one should obey the will of God, even though religious preachers untiringly go on telling you that acting according to the precepts of religion is really to one’s own advantage. But even if one accepts that, as a matter of fact, we are aware only of two types of reason, it does not seem to follow that there cannot be any other type of reason. To think that it did involve the simple fallacy of supposing that if we do not know of any other kind of reason then we do know that there cannot be any other kind of reason, for if there can be other kinds of reason why do we not know them? Surely one must allow for the possibility that entirely new concepts may be born to mankind. New sources of reason, new modes of thought can emerge and vanish from human consciousness. Even what passes in the name of moral reasons can be distinguished as belonging to different types of reason. One may look at the history of ideas to get support for this contention. For instance in the society reflected in the Homeric poems, as McIntyre observes, the most important judgements that can be passed upon a man concern the way in which he discharges his allotted social function. Thus

for a Homeric nobleman to be *agathos* or good is to be brave and skilful, and to possess the wealth and leisure to develop these skills, etc. So, he is, in ordinary English use of good, “good, but not kingly, courageous, or cunning”. This makes perfectly good sense; but in Homer, “*agathos*” but not “kingly, courageous, or clever” would not even be a morally eccentric form of judgement, but as it stands simply an unintelligible contradiction. (McIntyre, 1968, pp. 5-6) This observation is correct and what it amounts to is that for the Homeric nobleman the concept of morality was not a source of the same type of reasons as it is.

Furthermore, I am not convinced that the question “Why should I be moral?” cannot be legitimately interpreted as “Does being moral pay? Prichard suggests that those, such as Plato, who thought that morality should be justified in this way, wrongly believed that advantageousness is a criterion of moral behaviour. (Prichard, 1968)

But asking for the kind of justification in question does not necessarily require that morality itself should be conceived as being advantageous to the agent. What is being asked here is simply whether, as a matter of fact, being moral always or in the long run turns out to be, in some or other way, good for the agent. To give the criterion of moral behaviour itself will be to explain that form of behaviour, it will not necessarily justify it. However, the requirement of advantageousness is supposed to furnish the criterion which justifies to oneself one’s commitment to being moral. This is well expressed by Butler in his famous “cool hour” passage where he says that though virtue and moral rectitude is indeed founded on the conscience yet in a cool hour, when one reflects, one cannot justify to oneself acting in a way which is at least not contrary to one’s interests. The sceptic need not maintain that moral behaviour is directly aimed at the furtherance of self-interest, he only quires a justification of moral behaviour in terms of the satisfaction of self-interest. He would be satisfied if the answer were in the affirmative. But, it is argued, how could there be such a justification? For it is obvious that acting morally does not necessarily bring returns. Now, it is not clear to me how this shows that the demand for justification itself is illegitimate.

That there cannot be a prudential justification of morality need not worry the sceptic. He may reply: “indeed there cannot be such a justification. So you can’t really justify morality. Your answer to my question can only be, “you mostly ought to act morally, since that is the way to exist in a human society, but not always”. To this, however, it may be objected, as Griffiths(1957-58) does, that ‘to ask such a prudential question, and get such an answer, need disturb no one; it can throw no doubt on any moral principle’. Why? Because, to give a prudential answer “seems to contradict what we would say from a moral point of view. But of course it does not, since it is not a moral observation”. (Bittner & Talbot 1989, ch. 1)

Now, the sceptic might admit this. Indeed the prudential answer is not a moral observation, since it is not an answer from a moral point of view. But his question is precisely why should he adopt the moral point of view? How is he bound to act for moral reasons? There cannot be moral reasons for adopting the moral point of view and prudential reasons are not compelling enough. So there aren’t any good reasons. But perhaps this does not sufficiently represent the force of Griffiths’ argument. Perhaps the force of his argument rests in emphasizing the question “What sort of question is an egoist asking, when he asks why be moral?” If he asks a prudential question he gets a prudential answer. And it is not surprising that it does not satisfy him. But, Griffiths writes, “If the question is not prudential: if the questioner accepts some rules of behaviour other than prudential: then what sort of question is it? What sort of rules does the questioner accept? What kind of reasoning would satisfy him? Unless the questioner can give us the answer he is demanding, give us examples of the kind of reasoning he is asking us to produce, then his question is empty, pointless and meaningless. It has no use (for him)”.

This argument is powerful, but is it convincing? It seems to me doubtful that the egoist who asks for a good reason for being moral must know what kind of reasoning would satisfy him. The egoist’s enquiry is innocent not rhetorical. One cannot simply reply to him: “if you do not know what kind of reasoning would satisfy you then I do not know how to answer you”. One cannot let the matter rest at that, for the ignorance of two put together

does not count for wisdom. The egoist's question may have no practical point (if no one knows how to answer it) but it is not unintelligible. It should puzzle all those who are sincerely concerned with finding reasons for living this or that kind of life.

Before I move on to say how I think it can be answered, I must consider one last attempt to deal with it. Kurt Baier (1958, 308-310) has discussed it. (see also: Taliaferro & Griffiths 2003, 489)

His answering strategy can be summed up as follows. The question "Why should we be moral?" is, for him, the same as the question "Are moral reasons superior to all others?" And, since it is necessarily true that a rational being will always prefer superior reasons to inferior ones, to establish the supremacy of moral reasons is *eo ipso* to provide the reason for being moral. Now, his first argument is simply that 'the very *raison d'être* of a morality is to yield reasons which overrule the reasons of self-interest in those cases when everyone's following self-interest would be harmful to everyone. Hence moral reasons are superior to all others'. To this it may be objected that from the fact, if it is a fact, that we do regard moral reasons as superior to those of self-interest, it does not follow that we ought so to regard them. Nor is it true that it is always in my interest to regard them so. Nor can one argue that there are moral reasons for treating moral reasons as superior to reasons of self-interest. But what other reasons are there? How does Kurt Baier deal with it? "the answer is", he writes, 'that we are now looking at the world from the point of view of anyone. We are examining two alternative worlds, one in which moral reasons are always treated by everyone as superior to reasons of self-interest and one in which the reverse is the practice. And we can see that the first world is the better world, because we can see that the second world would be the sort which Hobbes describes as the state of nature'. This shows why I ought to be moral. I have now a reason for being moral, namely that moral reasons are superior to reasons of self-interest. Let us examine this argument.

We are told that a world in which everyone regarded moral reasons as superior to the reasons of self-interest will be a better world. But what is meant by "a world in which everyone

regarded moral reasons as superior? Presumably it is a world in which everyone does what he does (acting, choosing, advising, commending, etc.) for moral reasons rather than considerations of self-interest. But surely, even if such a world will be a better one, it will be only contingently so. We can imagine a world very much similar to it in which everyone was led, in his deliberations, solely by social conventions or by what they believed to be the will of God rather than moral considerations. I am envisaging a world in which no one really looked at life from a moral point of view although an anthropologist from our world may classify many patterns of their behaviour as moral behaviour. It is quite possible that such a world may bear a similar contrast to the Hobbesian world as does Kurt Baier's moral world. And morality, I take it, is neither the will of God nor the will of society. Furthermore, it is simply not true, from everyone's point of view, that if everyone followed his own interest then everyone would be miserable. Let an immoral but prudent and powerful monarch rule and enjoy life in a society where everyone does follow his own interests and obeys the ruler either due to coercion or only in so far as he finds it in his own interest to do so. Quite clearly the moral world of Kurt Baier will have no appeal to the monarch. However, let us waive this difficulty. Let us grant him that his moral world is a better world than the Hobbesian world and there are no other possible worlds. How does it show that moral reasons are superior to reasons of self-interest, and in what sense are they so? What is the criterion of the superiority of moral reasons? Well, simply stated, it is the fact that everyone's acting on moral reasons produces a better world. But, it may be asked; why should one bother about producing a better world? If there is no reason why one should bother to produce a better world then there is no reason why one should act on those superior reasons which are declared superior, only because acting on them produces a better world. The truth, however, as that for Kurt Baier there is a reason why one should bother about producing the better world. It is that the better world is the one in which everyone's interest is served best; everyone including the egoist. So the egoist ought to act on superior moral reasons because everyone ought to act so. And everyone ought to act so because everyone's acting so

will serve everyone's interest best. But this surely is nothing but a prudential justification of morality in disguise.

Let us review the situation so far. We first considered the argument that Plato's question is illegitimate since it is unanswerable. And when we felt that in a sense it is answerable, we followed Griffiths who argued that in so far as it is answerable it need disturb no one, and in so far as it is unanswerable it is meaningless. To Kurt Baier the question was meaningful and answerable. But as we saw, his answer was only a prudential answer in disguise. No one would deny that "Why should I be moral?" is, from the point of view of prudence, answerable. When one argues that the question is illegitimate one does not believe that no one could, in actual fact, intend to pose it as a prudential question. What is meant is that the point of asking it could not be the same as asking "Does being moral pay". And if, in actual fact one did ask it as a prudential question, it would be, as Griffiths observed, answerable and undisturbing. The burden of my argument, however, has been to defend the legitimacy of the question, even though it will be pointless to attempt a prudential answer to it. Now it is obvious that morality cannot be justified in non-prudential terms either. There can be no transcendental justification of morality, i.e. our question cannot be answered with reference to anything outside the field of morality whether it be self-interest, the will of God, the will of the society, human nature or what you like. For one who can ask "Why should I be moral?" can equally well ask "Why should I obey the will of God?" or, for that matter, "Why should I pursue exclusively what seems to be in my own interest?" etc. If it is not clear why one should be moral, it is not clear why one should be flagrantly self-seeking or exclusively benevolent either. If morality is in need of justification all other basic and supposedly autonomous forms of life are so as well. But if this is so, how could there be a justification of morality at all? To give a justification is to give a reason why one should commit oneself to morality. And giving a reason seems to involve a reference to some or other relevant fact which would, from the nature of our question, always be outside the field of morality. But a long protracted discussion of "Why do that?" involving a regressive reference to valued facts must end in a



rationally binding principle. It would seem, then, that if there is a justification of moralities there must be a relevant fact such that it provides a reason for living a moral life, and whose value within the context of a wider way of life must itself be in no way questionable.

Now, think that there is such a fact, the fact that moral agents are rational beings, which is unquestionable in the relevant sense. That is to say that being rational is not questionable in a way in which being moral is and being rational provides a reason for being moral. No one can seriously entertain the question “Why should I be rational?” in a way in which one can ask “Why should I be moral?” In the case of the former, it is a necessary condition of answering it that it should be answered in the affirmative. We cannot question reason rationally and there is no other way of questioning.

Thus we would have given a justification of morality if it could be shown that being rational in some sense required morality. One could then reply to the sceptic by saying that you ought to be moral in so far as you ought to be rational. And, since there is no doubt that you ought to be rational, there is no doubt that you got to be moral. Our problem is then to show how being rational involves being moral. What sort of connection is there between reason and morality? (Gewirth A.:1984)

## **II. Morality and Rationality**

Kant (1785), who presumably first thought that morality must be connected with rationality, maintained that the basic criterion of morality, the Categorical Imperative as he called it, can be seen to be entailed by man’s rationality. (Stratton-Lake 2008, 28; Cahn, Kitcher & Sher 1984, 87)

In this he is rightly thought to have signally failed. The concept of rationality which he employed can be described as a thin one in that it appealed only to the limited sense of ‘self-consistency’. But the concept of a rational being, a being who not only has a capacity to make logical distinctions but actually accepts the principle of non-contradiction can be seen to involve more than simply the idea of a being who avoids inconsistencies. For to accept it is normally to use it in actual judgements and arguments, i.e. to avoid making self-contradictory statements

and fallacious deductions, etc. And a being who accepts the principle in this way has a reason for making the logical distinctions he does, namely not to let himself land into inconsistencies. It is not that he just happens to make the distinctions that he does, nor is he simply caused to do so. Thus the idea of a being who acts on reason is necessarily involved in the idea of a being who, in the relevant sense, accepts the principle of theoretical reason.

A rational being is necessarily reasonable. We need not seek, then, to connect morality with rationality only in its limited sense as Kant did. In the context of actions, where a being is freely deciding what to do, he is said to be rational or irrational in virtue of whether or not he has reasons for doing what he does. Very often it is irrational just to let things happen to oneself, things which one could control, without the censorship of reason, for that may be destructive to one's wider aims or purposes. Where one can have a reason, sometimes, though not always, it is irrational not to have it, for the consequences of such acts may conflict with the achievement of those aims for which one has reasons. It is thus a general necessary condition of a rational life that one should be aware of the nature of not only what he consciously chooses to do but also of what is happening to him. For what is happening to him may have the consequence of either impairing his ability to be rational or, by changing the conditions of his life, of compelling him to abandon his rational aims in future. But would acting on reasons irrespective of what kind of reasons one has, constitute a sufficient condition for the rationality of his acts? A person who enters a pub which is in flames to buy a pint of beer has a reason for acting in the way he does; but is he being rational in doing so? I take it that the answer here is no. In so far as he acts with a reason at all he is being rational as opposed to being non-rational, but not as opposed to being irrational. He is not being rational since he does not have a good reason for doing what he does. With another reason his action might have been assessed as quite rational, e.g. if he entered the pub in order to save the life of someone trapped in it, provided it was not impossible to do so. Thus there will be a gradient of the conscious doings of a rational being ranging from irrational to

the wholly rational, parallel to the range of reasons he could adopt as his reasons, ranging from very bad to the very best. But when we say that he had a bad reason we do not mean to refer to some feature of the reason itself. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in wanting a drink and entering a pub. He had a bad reason for entering this particular pub on this particular occasion. So there must be something about the situation in which he acts, and also something about himself and his relationship with the situation, which enable us to talk of his actions as rational or irrational. His reason must be somehow fitting, must be appropriate to his actions. But an assessment of this fittingness will depend upon the nature of the agent and the situation in which he acts. It will involve knowledge of both the nature of the agent and his situation.

This idea of the suitability between what is done and why it is done (in the sense of what it is done for) is usually put the other way round in saying that a rational person is one who chooses most appropriate means to an already determined end. Thus what one gives as a reason for doing something is ultimately the end one has settled with, and acting rationally is acting in a manner that achieves that end. In a particular situation if a rational being is trying to determine the most rational course of action, he would need to be aware of the total strategy of the situation in which he is to act. This will involve an awareness of his own abilities to manoeuvre the most appropriate means to an already determined end, an awareness of his own susceptibility to various destructively persuasive outside influences affecting his deliberations. He must also be prepared to abandon the end in view (the source of his reason for doing what he proposes to do) if he sees it as impossible to achieve, either due to the inadequacy of the means available or due to the limitations of his own ability to make use of what is available. Further he must also abandon the particular end in view if its pursuit would conflict and damage the fulfilment of his wider aims or purposes in life to which he attaches more importance. It is irrational to pursue the end in view without ascertaining how it would affect the realization of what is of more ultimate value to him. His rational deliberations, therefore, in particular situations presuppose his awareness of a scheme of fundamental values.

To be able to answer rationally “What shall I do now?” presupposes that he has already answered for himself “How shall I live?” But has he, and how has he? The question “What shall I do?” when it concerns the choice of a whole way of life is not easy to answer. I shall argue that answering it satisfactorily would require a kind of knowledge which is very rarely found in human possession. Let us consider then how he has come to attach so much value to those ultimate ends with reference to which he assesses the rationality of his particular ends and actions.

There are no items of his experience which account for his original choice of what he ultimately values. Nor do we think of people as pure agents in the sense that they are the sole authors of their personality, that their characters are the product of their freely chosen actions. The ultimate values are not even arbitrarily chosen for he does not seem to choose them at all. It seems that there can only be an explanation in terms of causes of his attachment with the scheme of values, which is, psychologically, the springboard for his actions and philosophically the limit of their rational justification. But may he not question the significance of this attachment? May he not doubt the true value of his identification with his scheme of the ultimates? For the course of human life is necessarily regulated by the scheme of the fundamental concepts man has settled for himself. Not only has this, but his whole experience of life itself distils through this conceptual framework. Among other things, what most affects his decisions and choices is his understanding of himself. Imagine, what a vast difference there will be between the doings and experience of a man who was convinced and really regarded life as nothing but a preparation for after life, and a man who knew (if such a thing is possible) that there was no after life, or an artist who cared neither way and put the satisfaction of his creative urges above everything. The way one pictures life shows something of how he pictures himself, for he necessarily pictures himself as related to it. And in accepting himself as he finds himself in the world, i.e. in accepting his “presented” self, he is already deeply committed to a sense of values in terms of which he rationally justifies his acts. But in acting, psychologically, from the position of his presented self,

he is acting from an evaluatively committed standpoint. How does he philosophically justify his standpoint, his identification with his sense of values, the basis of his rational choices? Are his ultimates truly ultimate? Can there be no other sense of value for him? Is he condemned to act from the point of view of the kind of person he is? Or can he be different, radically different in his awareness of himself, in his experience of life. And above all will it be worth it? Answering questions of this sort presents a rational obligation to anyone who seriously questions the values he already accepts as guiding concepts for his deliberations. A reflective being necessarily finds himself as an agent with a certain personality. He finds himself placed in a complex empirical situation with a number of courses of action, with their peculiar logic and consequences open to him. The agent finds himself, by his own nature, compelled to choose. He cannot simply withdraw himself, for the withdrawal itself will be an act of choice. Even if he just lets it all happen to him his awareness of it all would necessarily involve a silent nodding; an acceptance or rejection of what is. As long as he exists he must go on choosing.

The possibility of human living is the possibility of choosing. Man is, as it were, condemned to choose. But he is not condemned to choose from the point of view of the presented self. For it seems to be an important truth about him that in his self-consciousness he stands at a distance from his own self. It is important since such a being can accept or reject himself. He can either lend himself to the demands of his presented self-he may thus live a normal life of ambition, of love and hatred, of self-oriented customary virtues and vices; or he can in his constant awareness of himself, standing at a distance from it, spontaneously reject its demands.

Through a deeper understanding of the totality of his presented nature he may transform it or he may destroy it. The field in which he exercises his choices is the entire fabrication of life given to him through his presented self. In accepting himself as he finds himself, he is accepting the fabricated life as the real field of his actions. But in standing apart from it he has the possibility of rejecting this fabrication. A wholly rational action, then, presupposes the choice of the self and its consequent life.

The rational attitude embodied in the question “What is the best thing for me to do?” requires one first to find out if, and in what ways, it is possible for one to choose oneself. It requires one to discover what makes one think, feel and behave the way one does; how it comes about that he attaches so much worth to the pursuit of the ends determined by the desires which he happens to have, what are the sources of the emotions and the sentiments which colour his perception of the real, his emotional identity which hides from him the truth about his being. In short, it requires him to understand how the human soul is seduced by the conditions of empirical life, and lends itself to seek what appears to be worthwhile. This very saintly sounding discovery is nothing short of the pursuit of Truth- the truth about ourselves as self-conscious agents and the enjoyers and the sufferers of the produce of our deeds and destiny, the truth about what is ultimately real and significant. It may involve a number of different ways of knowing, such as mystical illumination, religious revelation, an intuitive insight which goes beyond discursive reason, yoga and scientific induction, etc., and the product of all this brought into a synthesis in one’s subjective consciousness. This is the kind of knowledge which earlier I suggested was among the necessary conditions of answering the question “What shall I do?”, when it concerns the choice of a whole way of life. If this approach is at all valid, if, that is, to a rational being it is not only meaningful but necessary to ask “How shall I live?”, and if an attempt to answer it for oneself necessarily involves him in an actual search for the whole truth, then, I think, it can be seen that acting rationally under the empirical conditions of life requires one to accept a certain conduct-guiding principle which I believe is basic to morality, namely the principle which Sidgwick (1909) calls the Principle of Rational Benevolence. Accepting this principle requires one to act in those ways which are the fruits of one’s impartial consideration of the interests of all concerned. Now, let us finally consider if rationality can be integrated with impartiality in the idea of morality.

### **III. Moral Rationality and Impartiality**

In a minimal sense the acceptance of the principle of impartiality can be seen to be implied by our mere preparedness to be rational in our arguments. An argument on these lines has been put forward by Peters (1963, 31-32) although he thinks that the acceptance of the principle in question is implied not only in a minimal sense but in a full sense. When a person, he says, “attempts seriously to decide between the demands of different authorities, then he must, as a rational critical individual accept certain normative standards or procedure”. He must respect truth at all costs. For if we are prepared to attend seriously to what another person has to say, whatever his personal or social attributes, we must have at least a minimal respect for him as the source of an argument. But Peters goes further and argues that when one is doing moral philosophy, where one is demanding reasons for rules, the only sorts of reasons that count “are those that refer to the effect of the rule on someone or other’s interest”. In such a context “it is surely illogical for a man who is seriously interested in giving reasons for rules to consider any particular person’s interests as being any more important than anyone else’s unless good reasons can be shown for making such a distinction”. But I am not quite convinced that this argument shows that a rational being ought to act impartially in contexts other than that of rational discussion of a problem. (Griffiths: 1957-58,116 ) The anatomy of Peters’ argument seems to be as follows. The moralist says to the egoist: “You are seriously interested in being shown good reasons for accepting moral rules. You realize that other people have their own interest as well, and your rejection of morality will adversely affect their interests. But since you are prepared to discuss what ought to be done, you don’t already have good reasons for adversely affecting their interests. Therefore you ought to bother about their interests”. But what is meant by “good reasons” here? When Peters says that the moral sceptic has no good reasons ‘to consider any particular person’s interests as being any more important than anyone else’s’ he is, surely, not implying that the egoist in fact has no reason for disregarding others, since one may reserve one’s reasons and discuss the issue impartially without any loss of seriousness. What Peters is implying is that the egoist has no morally justifiable reason. But

the egoist's question is precisely why he should regard morally justifiable reasons as good reasons. And if it is not a question of having morally justifiable reasons, then, he certainly has a good reason for making distinctions of the kind in question, namely that it serves him well to do so. Nevertheless, I think that Peters is essentially right in connecting the rational activity of demanding reasons for accepting rules with the acceptance of the principle of impartiality. When he says that 'the very idea of searching for truth takes for granted, a norm of impartiality' he is stating an important truth, provided it is realized that the search for truth is not complete before the whole truth is known. In our discussion of the necessary conditions for making a rational choice, we have already seen how a rational being faced with the question "How shall I live?" is committed to a search for the ultimate truth. But faced with this question he is also faced with a dilemma. On the one hand a rational being who does not yet know the true nature of his own self, who is ignorant of man's situation and his destiny, cannot truly decide upon any particular scheme of values as ultimate. Perhaps it is here that a true humility and a respect for other rational beings is born. However, I am not concerned with the psychological product of this Socratic wisdom. My contention is that in the context of a rational justification of our deeds, to accept one's ignorance is to stand away from the point of evaluation. How, then, can one accept the principle of the pursuit of one's own interests as ultimate? He cannot decide to be a thorough-going egoist. Nor has he any reason to accept that scheme of values which gives this or that individual's or group of individuals' interests top priority. He has no reason either to be completely selfish or to be completely benevolent. On the other hand (and this is the second horn of the dilemma) the immediate demands of life are too pressing. He cannot wait to achieve self-realization and total understanding to become a Mohammad or Christ before he acts. He has to act now and here. In what manner should such a rational being act in such a predicament? The only alternative seems to be a life of total neutrality. But a human being, as already noticed, necessarily finds himself as an agent. He is necessarily placed in the context of choice and action. A mere passive neutrality is incompatible with the



rational demands of his nature as an agent. It is impossible to exist in total passivity. Thus it seems to me that the dilemma can be resolved only by adopting, what may be called, an attitude of active neutrality arising out of a state of choiceless awareness. In the context of conduct, however, an active neutrality implies nothing but acting from the point of view of complete impartiality. The rational being must translate his attitude into acts. Since he has no overriding reason to act in one way or the other apart from the necessary attitude in question, which is the product of his rational consideration of his situation, it will clearly be less rational to act as though he attached more worth to the interests of one as opposed to the other for no ultimately justifiable reason. To choose rationally in ignorance, and in an awareness of one's ignorance, is to choose from the point of view of complete impartiality. And in so far as impartiality is characteristic of morality, to fulfil one's rational obligation is *eo ipso* to fulfil one's moral obligations as well.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would say that while the justification of morality implies to be rational, the justification of the principle of impartiality does not solve the problem of justifying particular moral principles since these cannot be obtained by a simple deduction from the former. In particular cases what counts as being impartial would remain to be settled by independent arguments. And sometimes it may be difficult to come to an agreement, since there may not be one single answer. However, as Wittgenstein maintained, if the concept were to have a purchase in language, in general there will have to be an agreement on its exercise in judgements as well. Furthermore, it cannot be claimed at all that the application of the principle of impartiality covers the entire field of morality. There may very well be moral matters which have nothing to do with being partial or impartial to anyone, and I have given no justification for observing morality in those cases. There may also be systems of rules as claimed as morality in which the principle of impartiality has no place at all.

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