1: agent-centred morality - oi

In Agent-Centered Morality, George Harris argues that most of us aspire to a certain sort of integrity: We wish to be respectful of and sympathetic to others, and to be loving parents, friends, and members of our communities. Against a prevailing Kantian consensus, Harris offers an Aristotelian view of the problems presented by practical reason.

Autonomy would seem to be one such value. In utilitarian theory, however, autonomy appears to have its value only in its existence as a means to the greater end of well-being. Many philosophers have written on utilitarianism, directly or indirectly addressing this issue. Bernard Williams and J. Mackie consider autonomy to be fatally wounded by utilitarianism. Peter Singer and John Stuart Mill, however, consider autonomy to be merely infringed upon by the justifiable demands of the moral theory. The views of these four philosophers are presented in this paper in order to outline the particular nature of the problem that I claim finds its solution in the conciliatory writing of Scheffler. It is clear that for Williams, utilitarianism makes far too large of an infringement on personal values. A system admitting of such a feature, Williams assures, simply cannot be the best one for any agent. Holding an entirely different opinion of the alleged autonomy-shunning nature of utilitarianism is Peter Singer. Singer illustrates his claim with the hypothetical situation of his noticing a child drowning in a pond, on the way to his lecture. If complete agreement to this occurs, then no one should disagree that we morally ought to take steps to prevent other harmful conditions, if we are similarly able to do so without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance. Singer notes that the case of the drowning child is rare, but the case of poverty, to name one example, is not; it is an ongoing problem in the world everyday. If we recognize poverty as a bad thing, and are able to contribute to the minimization of it without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, Singer contends that we should. He displays this argument for the obligation to assist in premise form: If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do it. Absolute poverty is bad. There is some absolute poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance. We ought to prevent some absolute poverty. Singer does not stop there, conveying a commentary on the act of helping: We have an obligation to help those in absolute poverty which is no less strong than our obligation to rescue a drowning child from a pond. Not to help would be wrong? Helping is not, as conventionally thought, a charitable act which it is praiseworthy to do, but not wrong to omit; it is something that everyone ought to do. What Williams perceives as an erasing of autonomy is, for Singer, a real obligation to do good or prevent bad for others. This requirement, Singer holds, is not at all unreasonable, as it serves as a conclusion to simple, uncontroversial premises that neither consequentialists nor non-consequentialists would have difficulty endorsing. It is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought, to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are intended, not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up. Although Mill has included an obligation to not violate the rights of other agents, autonomy seems to thrive in his utilitarianism. The requirement of concern for the other is not a strenuous one, as its nature of yielding to those concerns of the individual makes it appear incapable of performing the kind of suffocation that Williams anticipates. Williams, Mill would state, wrongly interprets the motive of utilitarian action as the rule of it. Mackie expresses serious doubt about its ability to function with universalizability in a social setting, the setting in which the vast majority of individuals, especially those concerned about morality, are situated. All real societies, and all those which it is of direct practical use to consider, are ones whose members have to a great extent divergent and conflicting purposes, and consequently will not only not be motivated by a desire for the general happiness but also will commonly fail the proposed test of being such as to maximize the general happiness. With this impetus looming constantly over every human agent, the expectation of human motivation tending toward the general happiness is one that could only be thought to be reasonable in a state of fantasy. Acknowledging that beneficence does exist, Mackie makes clear that it has nothing to do with a universal concern, but instead with others whom the agent has a particularly special connection with, such as friends or family. The views that Mackie argues against that he has ascribed to Mill

are, in fact, opposite to those actually held by Mill. Consider the separate cases of two expedition leaders on journeys with groups of explorers. Both leaders find themselves, along with their groups, five feet from what they recognize to be the most lethal snake in the world. Knowing that the snake is startled and eager to attack, the leaders halt and order their groups to do the same, all the while knowing that it is too late, as whoever is closest to the snake five seconds from now will unavoidably perish. He orders the group to back away as he steps toward the snake. These polar positions on the acceptability of utilitarianism on the basis of its treatment of autonomy appear to warrant some sort of compromise, making both pairs of writers able to agree to a notion of acceptability with reference to a utilitarian moral structure. Not purporting to advocate utilitarianism, but rather, consequentialism, a broad category of moral theory of which utilitarianism belongs as a specific type, Samuel Scheffler appears to create this middle ground in his Human Morality. Such conflicts between agent and theory suggest that what a moral theory prescribes as and what an agent feels to be the morally right action can often be at odds with one another. Scheffler points out that the accusation that a moral theory is too demanding is made for one of two reasons. The first reason is that the theory allows for a minimal number of options of morally right behavior. For example, a Kantian agent who has a gun pointed to his head and another placed in his hand is coerced to take the life of a third party â€" or he will be the one to incur an abrupt demise. There are many possible courses of action he could take, but under his moral theory of choice, no option seems to be void of moral violation. If the agent complies, he commits a moral wrong by killing. If he refuses, he commits a moral wrong by endangering his own life. The second reason that a theory may be accused of being too demanding is that its requirements result in too much cost to the agent. For example, a consequentialist theory that strictly requires each agent to perform only those acts which will bring the greatest good to the greatest number would demand that an agent forgo his desire to pay rent to his landlord at the deadline of 5: He does believe that morality is deserving of its impersonal aspect, but feels that the most appropriate moral point-of-view is one that is agent-centered, at the heart of which should rest the agent-centered prerogative. Support for the agent-centered prerogative is support for a decrease in the extreme degree of impersonality that consequentialist theories typically embody, as attested to by Williams and Mackie. The remarks of Singer and Mill, however, cannot go forgotten. It is, to them, an uncontestable fact that situations arise in which agents are morally obligated to abandon their own projects in order to benefit others. By explaining that agents who adopt the agent-centered prerogative are indeed morally required to maintain an observance for the interests of others, Scheffler dispels the charge of selfishness that Singer or Mill would likely leap to level against his agent-centered prerogative. Just how much weight does the agent-centered prerogative give to personal projects? Scheffler makes clear that a consequentialist theory ascribing the agent-centered prerogative allows for a level of autonomy somewhere between the smothered, minimal amount that Williams and Mackie identify in utilitarianism, and the exclusively self-concerned free-reigning amount highlighting egoistic theories. For Scheffler to be more specific by placing a precise value to the amount of weight the agent-centered prerogative should carry for all agents, he would have to perform a job marked by arbitrariness and despotism. Human morality is a complex subject, as it is a divergence of two exceptionally complex topics, humans and morality. If he were so bold to do so, he would perform a groundless, arbitrary act. To diminish the haze surrounding the allotment of weight afforded to the agent-centered prerogative is to diminish the very autonomy that the agent-centered prerogative provides. Autonomy dwells in the haze. The agent-centered prerogative functions as a tool in the hands of each moral agent, used at his or her discretion, when the situation seems to call for it. A carpenter makes a judgment of when a saw is the best tool for his or her task, followed by judgments about what type of saw is best, where to apply the saw, in what manner, and for how long. If mistakes are made about any of these judgments, including the appropriateness of using a saw, the carpenter learns from them, and attempts to ameliorate his or her performance with respect to the saw. The assumption is that the carpenter wishes to be the best carpenter he or she can be, and make the best creation or repair he or she can make. Similarly, the agent-centered prerogative is a tool that the agent can use when he or she sees fit, making judgments about the amount of weight it carries in what situations, at what times, and with what other agents. The moral agent will learn from mistakes made with regard to use of the agent-centered prerogative, and attempt to ameliorate performance

with regard to it, as the moral agent wishes to be the most morally good agent possible. With his agent-centered prerogative, Scheffler has established a positive aspect of a normative moral theory of consequentialism that proves to be beneficial to all agents who observe it. It is the centerpiece to a moderate moral system, including permissions for individuals to pursue their interests, while simultaneously including rules that individuals are obligated to follow. This moral structure, resting in between the most rigid and lax of moralities, commanding moral demands and allowing freedoms both at once, would be of good use imbedded within the utilitarian framework discussed by Williams, Singer, Mill, and Mackie. A utilitarian system requiring the course of action producing the greatest outcome for all, when combined with the preservation of autonomy, as could be supplied by the agent-centered prerogative, would be a largely acceptable moral theory, that would manage to be agent-friendly while exacting observance to moral obligation from its followers. Works Cited Mackie, J. Inventing Right and Wrong. Readings in Moral Theory. Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press,

2: Agent-Based Virtue Ethics - Bibliography - PhilPapers

Common-sense morality includes various agent-centred constraints, including ones against killing unnecessarily and breaking a promise. However, it's not always clear whether, had an agent Ï•-ed, she would have violated a constraint.

Consequentialism Because deontological theories are best understood in contrast to consequentialist ones, a brief look at consequentialism and a survey of the problems with it that motivate its deontological opponents, provides a helpful prelude to taking up deontological theories themselves. Some consequentialists are monists about the Good. Other consequentialists are pluralists regarding the Good. Moreover, there are some consequentialists who hold that the doing or refraining from doing, of certain kinds of acts are themselves intrinsically valuable states of affairs constitutive of the Good. None of these pluralist positions erase the difference between consequentialism and deontology. For the essence of consequentialism is still present in such positions: However much consequentialists differ about what the Good consists in, they all agree that the morally right choices are those that increase either directly or indirectly the Good. Consequentialism is frequently criticized on a number of grounds. Two of these are particularly apt for revealing the temptations motivating the alternative approach to deontic ethics that is deontology. The two criticisms pertinent here are that consequentialism is, on the one hand, overly demanding, and, on the other hand, that it is not demanding enough. The criticism regarding extreme demandingness runs like this: All acts are seemingly either required or forbidden. On the other hand, consequentialism is also criticized for what it seemingly permits. It seemingly demands and thus, of course, permits that in certain circumstances innocents be killed, beaten, lied to, or deprived of material goods to produce greater benefits for others. Consequencesâ€”and only consequencesâ€”can conceivably justify any kind of act, for it does not matter how harmful it is to some so long as it is more beneficial to others. A well-worn example of this over-permissiveness of consequentialism is that of a case standardly called, Transplant. A surgeon has five patients dying of organ failure and one healthy patient whose organs can save the five. In the right circumstances, surgeon will be permitted and indeed required by consequentialism to kill the healthy patient to obtain his organs, assuming there are no relevant consequences other than the saving of the five and the death of the one. Likewise, consequentialism will permit in a case that we shall call, Fat Man that a fat man be pushed in front of a runaway trolley if his being crushed by the trolley will halt its advance towards five workers trapped on the track. We shall return to these examples later on. Consequentialists are of course not bereft of replies to these two criticisms. This move opens up some space for personal projects and relationships, as well as a realm of the morally permissible. It is not clear, however, that satisficing is adequately motivated, except to avoid the problems of maximizing. Nor is it clear that the level of mandatory satisficing can be nonarbitrarily specified, or that satisficing will not require deontological constraints to protect satisficers from maximizers. On this view, our negative duty is not to make the world worse by actions having bad consequences; lacking is a corresponding positive duty to make the world better by actions having good consequences Bentham ; Quinton We thus have a consequentialist duty not to kill the one in Transplant or in Fat Man; and there is no counterbalancing duty to save five that overrides this. Yet as with the satisficing move, it is unclear how a consistent consequentialist can motivate this restriction on all-out optimization of the Good. Yet another idea popular with consequentialists is to move from consequentialism as a theory that directly assesses acts to consequentialism as a theory that directly assesses rulesâ€”or character-trait inculcationâ€”and assesses acts only indirectly by reference to such rules or character-traits Alexander Its proponents contend that indirect consequentialism can avoid the criticisms of direct act consequentialism because it will not legitimate egregious violations of ordinary moral standardsâ€”e. The relevance here of these defensive maneuvers by consequentialists is their common attempt to mimic the intuitively plausible aspects of a non-consequentialist, deontological approach to ethics. For as we shall now explore, the strengths of deontological approaches lie: In contrast to consequentialist theories, deontological theories judge the morality of choices by criteria different from the states of affairs those choices bring about. The most familiar forms of deontology, and also the forms presenting the greatest contrast to consequentialism, hold that some choices cannot be justified by their

effectsâ€"that no matter how morally good their consequences, some choices are morally forbidden. On such familiar deontological accounts of morality, agents cannot make certain wrongful choices even if by doing so the number of those exact kinds of wrongful choices will be minimized because other agents will be prevented from engaging in similar wrongful choices. For such deontologists, what makes a choice right is its conformity with a moral norm. Such norms are to be simply obeyed by each moral agent; such norm-keepings are not to be maximized by each agent. In this sense, for such deontologists, the Right is said to have priority over the Good. If an act is not in accord with the Right, it may not be undertaken, no matter the Good that it might produce including even a Good consisting of acts in accordance with the Right. Analogously, deontologists typically supplement non-consequentialist obligations with non-consequentialist permissions Scheffler That is, certain actions can be right even though not maximizing of good consequences, for the rightness of such actions consists in their instantiating certain norms here, of permission and not of obligation. Such actions are permitted, not just in the weak sense that there is no obligation not to do them, but also in the strong sense that one is permitted to do them even though they are productive of less good consequences than their alternatives Moore Such strongly permitted actions include actions one is obligated to do, but importantly also included are actions one is not obligated to do. It is this last feature of such actions that warrants their separate mention for deontologists. Consider first agent-centered deontological theories. According to agent-centered theories, we each have both permissions and obligations that give us agent-relative reasons for action. An agent-relative reason is an objective reason, just as are agent neutral reasons; neither is to be confused with the subjective reasons that form the nerve of psychological explanations of human action Nagel An agent-relative reason is so-called because it is a reason relative to the agent whose reason it is; it need not although it may constitute a reason for anyone else. Thus, an agent-relative obligation is an obligation for a particular agent to take or refrain from taking some action; and because it is agent-relative, the obligation does not necessarily give anyone else a reason to support that action. Likewise, an agent-relative permission is a permission for some agent to do some act even though others may not be permitted to aid that agent in the doing of his permitted action. Each parent, to revert to the same example, is commonly thought to be permitted at the least to save his own child even at the cost of not saving two other children to whom he has no special relation. At the heart of agent-centered theories with their agent-relative reasons is the idea of agency. The moral plausibility of agent-centered theories is rooted here. The idea is that morality is intensely personal, in the sense that we are each enjoined to keep our own moral house in order. Our categorical obligations are not to focus on how our actions cause or enable other agents to do evil; the focus of our categorical obligations is to keep our own agency free of moral taint. Agent-centered theories famously divide between those that emphasize the role of intention or other mental states in constituting the morally important kind of agency, and those that emphasize the actions of agents as playing such a role. There are also agent-centered theories that emphasize both intentions and actions equally in constituting the morally relevant agency of persons. On the first of these three agent-relative views, it is most commonly asserted that it is our intended ends and intended means that most crucially define our agency. Such intentions mark out what it is we set out to achieve through our actions. Three items usefully contrasted with such intentions are belief, risk, and cause. If we predict that an act of ours will result in evil, such prediction is a cognitive state of belief ; it is not a conative state of intention to bring about such a result, either as an end in itself or as a means to some other end. In this case, our agency is involved only to the extent that we have shown ourselves as being willing to tolerate evil results flowing from our acts; but we have not set out to achieve such evil by our acts. We can intend such a result, and we can even execute such an intention so that it becomes a trying, without in fact either causing or even risking it. It is, however, true that we must believe we are risking the result to some extent, however minimal, for the result to be what we intend to bring about by our act. Also, we can cause or risk such results without intending them. For example, we can intend to kill and even try to kill someone without killing him; and we can kill him without intending or trying to kill him, as when we kill accidentally. Intending thus does not collapse into risking, causing, or predicting; and on the version of agent-centered deontology here considered, it is intending or perhaps trying alone that marks the involvement of our agency in a way so as to bring agent-centered obligations and permissions into play. Deontologists of this stripe are committed to something like the

doctrine of double effect, a long-established doctrine of Catholic theology Woodward The Doctrine in its most familiar form asserts that we are categorically forbidden to intend evils such as killing the innocent or torturing others, even though doing such acts would minimize the doing of like acts by others or even ourselves in the future. Whether such distinctions are plausible is standardly taken to measure the plausibility of an intention-focused version of the agent-centered version of deontology. There are other versions of mental-state focused agent relativity that do not focus on intentions Hurd Some of these versions focus on predictive belief as much as on intention at least when the belief is of a high degree of certainty. Still others focus on the deliberative processes that precede the formation of intentions, so that even to contemplate the doing of an evil act impermissibly invokes our agency Anscombe ; Geach ; Nagel The second kind of agent-centered deontology is one focused on actions, not mental states. Such a view can concede that all human actions must originate with some kind of mental state, often styled a volition or a willing; such a view can even concede that volitions or willings are an intention of a certain kind Moore , Ch. Indeed, such source of human actions in willing is what plausibly connects actions to the agency that is of moral concern on the agent-centered version of deontology. Yet to will the movement of a finger on a trigger is distinct from an intention to kill a person by that finger movement. The act view of agency is thus distinct from the intentions or other mental state view of agency. On this view, our agent-relative obligations and permissions have as their content certain kinds of actions: The killing of an innocent of course requires that there be a death of such innocent, but there is no agency involved in mere events such as deaths. Needed for there to be a killing are two other items. One we remarked on before: But the other maker of agency here is more interesting for present purposes: Much on this view is loaded into the requirement of causation. First, causings of evils like deaths of innocents are commonly distinguished from omissions to prevent such deaths. Our categorical obligations are usually negative in content: We may have an obligation to save it, but this will not be an agent-relative obligation, on the view here considered, unless we have some special relationship to the baby. Second, causings are distinguished from allowings. In a narrow sense of the word we will here stipulate, one allows a death to occur when: Nor is one categorically forbidden to select which of a group of villagers shall be unjustly executed by another who is pursuing his own purposes Williams Fourth, one is said not to cause an evil such as a death when one merely redirects a presently existing threat to many so that it now threatens only one or a few Thomson In the time-honored example of the run-away trolley Trolley , one may turn a trolley so that it runs over one trapped workman so as to save five workmen trapped on the other track, even though it is not permissible for an agent to have initiated the movement of the trolley towards the one to save five Foot ; Thomson Fifth, our agency is said not to be involved in mere accelerations of evils about to happen anyway, as opposed to causing such evils by doing acts necessary for such evils to occur G. Williams ; Brody Thus, when a victim is about to fall to his death anyway, dragging a rescuer with him too, the rescuer may cut the rope connecting them. Rescuer is accelerating, but not causing, the death that was about to occur anyway. All of these last five distinctions have been suggested to be part and parcel of another centuries-old Catholic doctrine, that of the doctrine of doing and allowing see the entry on doing vs. As with the Doctrine of Double Effect, how plausible one finds these applications of the doctrine of doing and allowing will determine how plausible one finds this cause-based view of human agency. A third kind of agent-centered deontology can be obtained by simply conjoining the other two agent-centered views Hurd This view would be that agency in the relevant sense requires both intending and causing i.

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Agent-Centered Morality What kinds of persons do we aspire to be, and how do our aspirations fit with our ideas of rationality? In Agent-Centered Morality, George Harris argues that most of us aspire to a certain sort of integrity: We wish to be respectful of and sympathetic to others, and to be loving parents, friends, and members of our.

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: An Aristotelian Alternative to Kantian Internalism. University of California Press, Contemporary philosophers have found substantial resources in the ethical writings of both Aristotle and Kant. Together Aristotelian-inspired virtue ethics and Kantian constructivism have not only contributed greatly to the resurgence of interest in normative theory in recent decades, but have also provided the most prominent alternatives to the utilitarianism that has dominated Anglo-American ethics for so long. However, the development of these ethical projects has been carried out largely independently of one another. In Agent-Centered Morality, George Harris helps to overcome this lacuna by comparing and contrasting these two competing versions of [End Page] morality. As such, this work is a welcome addition to the literature both as a survey of recent work in Aristotelian and Kantian ethics as well as an account of the many ways in which they converge and diverge in their corresponding treatments of practical rationality. As such, Harris correctly argues that these projects have much more in common than has sometimes been supposed. The central question that Harris raises in this book is which account of practical reason is best suited for this task. His thesis is that the Aristotelian model gives us a more plausible picture of the role of norms within practical rationality. The major distinction between the Aristotelian and the Kantian models according to Harris is that while on the Aristotelian model the norms made use of in practical judgments are symmetric in their regulative function, the Kantian model provides an asymmetrical account of norms. To arbitrate between these two views, Harris proposes an integration test. The point of the integration test is to assure that our account of practical rationality and the function of regulative norms that it provides can support the integrity of rational agents. Minimally then, the test will favor the account of practical rationality that best "integrates the various concerns of rational human agents in a way that preserves integrity" For Harris maintains that the Aristotelian symmetrical model integrates regulative norms better than the Kantian model. To show why, Harris makes use of a number of examples to demonstrate that regulative norms function in a symmetrical fashion in regards to one another for the agent of integrity. For instance, to show that the norm of impartial respect is sometimes regulated by the norm of impartial sympathy, Harris gives an example of someone who breaks a lunch date in order to help a dog that is being mistreated. Likewise, Harris uses examples to argue that sometimes even partial norms, like that of parental concern, regulate the impartial norm of respect. Harris believes that these cases demonstrate that the regulative norms made use of in practical deliberation must function in a symmetrical fashion. Thus, Harris thinks we have good reason to reject the Kantian view "that the integrative function of practical reason is achieved by an impartial norm that is asymmetrical in its regulative function" Though interesting and worthy of attention, I am not convinced that Harris makes use of the most plausible understanding of the Kantian model of practical rationality in his central argument. By focusing almost exclusively upon the idea of respect, Harris assumes that the best reading of the Kantian project will be founded primarily in the idea of impartial respect. However, if we adopt a procedural understanding of the Categorical Imperative, a plausible case could be made that a Kantian account of practical rationality can account for the examples that Harris makes use of just as well as the Aristotelian.

Agent-centered Morality is, I believe, a mature book, but it does not represent the end of the process or a final coherence. Under Berlin's influence, I have come to doubt that there is such a thing. Under Berlin's influence, I have come to doubt that there is such a thing.

An Aristotelian Alternative to Kantian Internalism. Though there will be plenty of detailed argument in the text, here I would like to provide some autobiographical thoughts that might help the reader to understand something of the soul of this book. Anyone familiar with the Deep South at that time and with that book should know why. The experience began a process that continues to this day, a process in search of moral coherence where innocence has been lost. Much later in my life, with much less innocence and a great deal more complexity, I discovered Kant, who for a long time seemed to restore equilibrium. But innocence lost is never regained and coherence restored is always only partial and often temporary. Reading Styron led me to think more deeply about moral luck, to the current philosophical literature on that topic, and to read Aristotle again. This led me even farther away from Kant and to the views expressed here in Agentcentered Morality. What does not get fully expressed in this book is how my discovery and appreciation of the work of Isaiah Berlin, especially his objective pluralism, require me to reject some central theses of Aristotle. But I do not here show or attempt to show that there might be persons whose quality of character is both different from and incommensurable with the kind of character I think many of us want most to be like. I do think there are such persons. Nor do I discuss the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of the virtues, a doctrine that I believe is incompatible both with the facts regarding the plurality of human valuing and with the facts regarding the neurological possibilities for members of our species. I say all this because I have come to Berlin late but can already tell that reading him at this much later point in my life is like having read To Kill a Mockingbird so many years ago. Or perhaps, though far less likely, I will write a book that will reveal yet another transition of a deeper kind that leaves both Kant and Aristotle behind. Though it might seem odd to preface a book ten years in the writing with a cautionary note of this sort, I hope it reflects some honesty and some reassurance to those who find themselves involved in similar struggles to understand and appreciate the complexities of life. Agent-centered Morality is, I believe, a mature book, but it does not represent the end of the process or a final coherence. One of the special difficulties involved in writing a book is the task of defining its parameters. This is motivated in part by the simple desire to finish. But if this were the only motivational current at work, the task would be easy. One could just quit with the desire to move on. The agony begins, however, at the confluence of the desire for closure and myriad other concerns. Any good writer or thinker is deeply committed to all these things, and being committed to all is what makes being a writer so very difficult. Nevertheless, the one feature of a book that is not contingent, if it is to find its way to readers, is that it must come to an end. On the other hand, a book can lack some rigor of argumentation; it can lack completeness of analysis; it can tolerate a good deal of infelicitous expression; and, as we all know, it can be very unfair to its rivals. The various motivational factors involved in the desire to finish are diverse, and some are more pressing than others. So if one is to do these other things and finish the book, one must do the best one can under the circumstances. I have tried to be true to these commitments, especially regarding fairness to my rivals. Doubtless my depiction of the opposition could in some cases be more detailed. My apologies, then, where I have not dealt with others as I might were we not all walled in by space and time. I am extremely grateful to Ed Dimendberg, the philosophy editor at the University of California Press, for his interest in my work. The production of my previous book, Dignity and Vulnerability , was simply superb. An author could not ask for more professional treatment than I have received from Ed and the people at California. I am especially grateful to Cindy Fulton, production editor, and to Sheila Berg, copy editor, for their excellent work. Many others have contributed in both direct and indirect ways to the manuscript. Paul Davies, more than anyone else, has been a constant sounding board and reliable critic. Greg Baier, Larry Becker, E. I wish also to thank Marcia Baron and Christine Korsgaard for answering some questions by email regarding their work. To my students at the College of William and Mary who have made many valuable contributions to my

work, I am enormously grateful, as I am to Debbie Wilson, the department secretary, who has been an utterly reliable resource. I wish also to thank the College of William and Mary for two research leaves to complete this project. And to many others I have failed to mention, I express my heartfelt gratitude. During the period in which this book was written, three of the most important events of my life transpired. I married my wife, Patty, and my two daughters, Rachel and Jenny, were born. It is to the three of them that this book is dedicated. The order is important, because the results of inquiry are often dictated by where it begins. I start then with a brief explanation of why I proceed in the way that I do and where I think it leads. I distinguish my approach from two others, one that begins with morality and proceeds to agency and practical reason and another that begins, as I do, with agency. The latter view has gained much currency among contemporary moral philosophers with the revived interest in the ethics of Immanuel Kant. I refer to a school of thought called Kantian internalism. Cambridge University Press, ; Henry E. Oxford University Press, ; and Christine M. Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, My primary goal here is to construct an agent-centered conception that is largely Aristotelian in its structure and to argue that it is superior to the alternative of Kantian internalism. According to a long and venerable philosophical tradition dating back to the Enlightenment, morality is a normative perspective that has three essential features. It is impartial in its evaluations and demands; it universally applies to all human beings who can properly be called agents; and it is one that is rational for all rational human agents to take against alternative perspectives. A major reason that the order that begins with human agency is important is that if we proceed in this way we find that all three Enlightenment claims regarding morality are false, or so I will argue. An even more important reason is that we can discover a better alternative. The reverse order of the one suggested here is the approach historically associated with one interpretation of the Enlightenment tradition. Because the Enlightenment tradition, on this interpretation, begins with an analysis of the morality of actions and obligations and proceeds to the morality of agents and character, it is act-centered rather than agent-centered. A major puzzle of this approach is that it quickly generates the problem of why we should be moral: Somehow we are first to understand what morality requires of us and then to worry over whether those requirements are rational. But if we are concerned with rationality, why begin with morality at all? Why not begin with an account of practical reason and see if anything resembling morality shows up within the account? The danger of the traditional methodology is that distortions of practical reason will be imposed to save the conception of morality. This explains, then, why I think that practical reason comes before morality. But why think that a prior conception of agency is necessary for a conception of practical reason? I defend the claim that practical rationality is character-relative in the sense that what is practically rational for an agent turns on the land of person the agent is. In this regard, we sometimes describe others as courageous, temperate, or long-suffering. When we do, we employ aretaic concepts involving self-control. On other occasions, we describe others as respectful, sympathetic, loving, or devoted. When we do, we employ concepts involving virtues that I call virtues of caring. It is in terms of the latter, the virtues of caring, that I claim practical reason is character-relative. Thus I begin not with an account of morality in terms of moral agency but with an account of practical reason in terms of human character, in terms of the integrity of human agency. I then provide a conception of morality within that conception of practical reason. Finally, the claim that practical reason is character-relative a point to which I will return at the end of this introduction does not in itself deny the universality of morality, for character might be shared among human beings in a way that establishes a substantial universal form of practical reason and therefore of morality. Very reluctantly, I have come to the conclusion that there is no such form. Nevertheless, there is a conception of morality, I will argue, that is practically rational for a surprisingly large portion of humanity. Things are relative but not as relative as some relativists would have us believe. Constructing this conception of morality is by far the main task of this book. I argue for a conception of human agency that begins with the concept of human integrity. In the process, I argue that criteria for practical rationality are character-relative. I then argue that normative beliefs, including beliefs about obligation, have rational foundation in terms of their providing solutions to what I call integration problems. Moreover, it is the notion of integrity that provides us with a test for adjudicating philosophical disputes about the nature of rational agency. This test I call the integration test. It will turn out

that the dispute between the view presented here and the view of Kantian internalism turns on a dispute about the nature of rational agency. If such a dispute can be rationally adjudicated and one of the views is correct, there must be some test that selects for the better theory. It is the integration test that plays this adjudicating role. Later, we will see what this test is. A reason for suspecting that integrity is the clue to providing an adequate conception of practical reason involves a central issue of this book: Less technically and more generally, the idea is something like the following. People care about a variety of things in a variety of ways. They love their friends, their families, and their communities; they respect, sympathize with, and esteem strangers; they are dedicated to their work and enjoy their play, and they are committed to causes, practices, and principles. All these things factor into practical reason being what it is for at least most human beings. Some of these norms are "partial" because they involve personal connectedness in a sense that others do not. Loving a child is a good example of a partial norm. Other norms lack this personal element and are best understood as "impartial. One of the central questions of this book is, How are we are to understand these norms and their interrelationships such that they are the norms of a person as a practical reasoner? A very general answer is that they must be integrated as a roughly coherent set of norms. To be a set of norms that reflect personhood and practical reason they must achieve a certain kind of integrity as a whole.

Agent-centered Morality An Aristotelian Alternative to Kantian Internalism George W. Harris UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS Berkeley Â· Los Angeles Â· Oxford.

The order is important, because the results of inquiry are often dictated by where it begins. I start then with a brief explanation of why I proceed in the way that I do and where I think it leads. I distinguish my approach from two others, one that begins with morality and proceeds to agency and practical reason and another that begins, as I do, with agency. The latter view has gained much currency among contemporary moral philosophers with the revived interest in the ethics of Immanuel Kant. I refer to a school of thought called Kantian internalism. Explorations of Kant Practical Philosophy Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ; Henry E. Allison, Kant Theory of Freedom Cambridge: Oxford University Press, ; and Christine M. Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, My primary goal here is to construct an agent-centered conception that is largely Aristotelian in its structure and to argue that it is superior to the alternative of Kantian internalism. According to a long and venerable philosophical tradition dating back to the Enlightenment, morality is a normative perspective that has three essential features. It is impartial in its evaluations and demands; it universally applies to all human beings who can properly be called agents; and it is one that is rational for all rational human agents to take against alternative perspectives. A major reason that the order that begins with human agency is important is that if we proceed in this way we find that all three Enlightenment claims regarding morality are false, or so I will argue. An even more important reason is that we can discover a better alternative. The reverse order of the one suggested here is the approach historically associated with one interpretation of the Enlightenment tradition. Because the Enlightenment tradition, on this interpretation, begins with an analysis of the morality of actions and obligations and proceeds to the morality of agents and character, it is act-centered rather than agent-centered. A major puzzle of this approach is that it quickly generates the problem of why we should be moral: Somehow we are first to understand what morality requires of us and then to worry over whether those requirements are rational. But if we are concerned with rationality, why begin with morality at all? Why not begin with an account of practical reason and see if anything resembling morality shows up within the account? The danger of the traditional methodology is that distortions of practical reason will be imposed to save the conception of morality. This explains, then, why I think that practical reason comes before morality. But why think that a prior conception of agency is necessary for a conception of practical reason? I defend the claim that practical rationality is character- relative in the sense that what is practically rational for an agent turns on the kind of person the agent is. In this regard, we sometimes describe others as courageous, temperate, or long-suffering. When we do, we employ aretaic concepts involving self-control. On other occasions, we describe others as respectful, sympathetic, loving, or devoted. When we do, we employ concepts involving virtues that I call virtues of caring. It is in terms of the latter, the virtues of caring, that I claim practical reason is character-relative. Thus I begin not with an account of morality in terms of moral agency but with an account of practical reason in terms of human character, in termsof the integrity of human agency. I then provide a conception of morality within that conception of practical reason. Finally, the claim that practical reason is character-relative a point to which I will return at the end of this introduction does not in itself deny the universality of morality, for character might be shared among human beings in a way that establishes a substantial universal form of practical reason and therefore of morality. Very reluctantly, I have come to the conclusion that there is no such form. Nevertheless, there is a conception of morality, I will argue, that is practically rational for a surprisingly large portion of humanity. Things are relative but not as relative as some relativists would have us believe. Constructing this conception of morality is by far the main task of this book. I argue for a conception of human agency that begins with the concept of human integrity. In the process, I argue that criteria for practical rationality are character- relative. I then argue that normative beliefs, including beliefs about obligation, have rational foundation in terms of their providing solutions to what I call integration problems. Moreover, it is the notion of integrity that provides us with a test for adjudicating

philosophical disputes about the nature of rational agency. This test I call the integration test. It will turn out that the dispute between the view presented here and the view of Kantian internalism turns on a dispute about the nature of rational agency. If such a dispute can be rationally adjudicated and one of the views is correct, there must be some test that selects for the better theory. It is the integration test that plays this adjudicating role. Later, we will see what this test is. A reason for suspecting that integrity is the clue to providing an adequate conception of practical reason involves a central issue of this book: Less technically and more generally, the idea is something like the following. People care about a variety of things in a variety of ways. They love their friends, their families, and their communities; they respect, sympathize with, and esteem strangers; they are dedicated to their work and enjoy their play, and they are committed to causes, practices, and principles. All these things factor into practical reason being what it is for at least most human beings. Some of these norms are "partial" because they involve personal connectedness in a sense that others do not. Loving a child is a good example of a partial norm. Other norms lack this personal element and are best understood as "impartial. One of the central questions of this book is, How are we are to understand these norms and their interrelationships such that they are the norms of a person as a practical reasoner? A very general answer is that they must be integrated as a roughly coherent set of norms. To be a set of norms that reflect personhood and practical reason they must achieve a certain kind of integrity as a whole. As such, they must constitute a psychology. Another, more specific answer, of course, is to be found among the various Enlightenment conceptions of practical reason and morality, the most developed of which is the Kantian branch of that tradition. In chapter z, I argue that to achieve the necessary kind of wholeness or integrity and to account for the right psychology, the relationships among these regulative norms cannot be hierarchical in the way required by the Enlightenment tradition. More precisely, I argue that this is true on the assumptions of our considered moral judgments. Against some of the most recent attempts to defend an Enlightenment view, I argue that human agents must integrate the kinds of concerns they have into a manageably coherent life in order to be agents at all and that there is no way of achieving such integration through a dominant norm that regulates other norms without being regulated in any way by them. That is, the regulative relationships among norms must be symmetrical rather than asymmetrical in order to achieve integration of the sort necessary for at least most humans. If this is true, I argue, then neither impartial respect nor impartial sympathy can do the work required of them by Kantians and utilitarians. Moreover, I argue that no norm can be asymmetrically dominant over other norms within practical reason, no matter whether it is partial or impartial. The reader might think of this as a hypothesis and the remainder of the book as a test of it. It is from this perspective that I develop a specific answer to our question that is an alternative to the Enlightenment tradition. To be sure, any agent-neutral theory may either allow or require an agent under appropriate circumstances to pursue his or her own good, but this occurs in only two ways. One involves moral coincidence: The other involves an instrumental necessity to the ends of an agent-neutral conception of morality: Increasingly, many contemporary philosophers share the view that human agents are surely not the kinds of agents required by agent-neutral theories of morality. They also share the view that it is a good thing they are not. Lacking in this literature, however, is any developed conception of practical reason and morality that represents an alternative to the Enlightenment tradition. What is needed is an alternative moral psychology that will supply the account of regulative norms that the Enlightenment tradition has failed to provide. Moreover, that account must accommodate what is valid in recent Kantian defenses against contemporary philosophical attacks. While I share the view that it is a good thing we are not the kinds of agents required by agent-neutral conceptions of morality, I do not reject the moral status of our agency. What allows me to do this is a reversal of methodology, which is Aristotelian in spirit. I begin by asking what human agents are like. Contemporary Essays on Moral Character, ed. Kruschwitz and Robert C. Only after coming to a somewhat affirmative and informative answer to this question do I proceed. I believe that there is. If I am right about this, then all morality must be agent-centered in one very important sense: There can be no acceptable theory of moral obligation that is entirely agent-neutral. Moral obligation cannot be entirely independent of what is good for the agent who has the obligations of morality. The connection for which I argue is this: Being an ongoing agent, therefore, essentially involves finding life worthwhile and having reasons for living. It also involves

having reasons for living one way rather than another. If this is true, then no individual act that is destructive to the most fundamental goods of that life can be morally obligatory for an agent. Only then does it allow me to proceed to questions of obligation. If we are to think of morality as a function of practical reason and understand practical reason in terms of the integrative functions of human consciousness, we need a general account of an integrative function. For this we need a general account of integrity. I call this general account the thin conception of integrity. The thin conception of integrity focuses on the person to whom we are willing to attribute at least four features. The first of these features is a sense of self that is sufficiently unified to allow us to say that the person has at least one and no more than one basic "self. The third is the strength of character to meet significant challenges to that which makes this sense of self possible. And the fourth is a sense of self as intrinsically important to some degree as a separate and numerically distinct person. I say much more about the concept of integrity and motivate its elements in chapter 3, but it seems important for purposes of clarity to comment briefly here on the first two elements.

6: Deontological Ethics (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

In Agent-Centered Morality, George Harris argues that most of us aspire to a certain sort of integrity: We wish to be respectful of and sympathetic to others, and to be loving parents, friends, and members of our communities.

7: Agent-centered Morality

Agent-Centered Teleology. There is a related worry about non-consequentialist judgements of rightness. Certain moral theories require agents to maximize agent-centered value (Broome ,).

8: Project MUSE - Agent-Centered Morality: An Aristotelian Alternative to Kantian Internalism (review)

The view opposes the impartial, impersonal, or public aspect of traditional moral thinking, including utilitarianism, which seeks to minimize the agent's perspective in favour of that of a general point of view, an ideal observer, or an objective sum of all affected utilities.

9: Deontological ethics - RationalWiki

Agent-centered deontologists focus on keeping one's moral record spotless no matter what the cost and deal mostly with the actions that one performs. Patient-centered deontologists, on the other hand, focus on upholding one's rights, such as independence, and on respecting the rights of others.

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