The Retreat of Reason

A Dilemma in the Philosophy of Life

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INTRODUCTION

Some are wise, some are otherwise.
(quoted by J. S. Mill from
a newspaper)

To the general public, a philosopher seems to be, roughly, a person who seeks insight into the nature of reality, and tries to live in accordance with this insight. Philosophical *wisdom* could be taken to consist in the achievement of this aim. In ancient times, philosophers seem more or less to have corresponded to this conception (the conception may have been modelled on their example). In broad outline, they sketched a view of the world, to the effect that it was all motion, all unified or divided into two kinds of dimension, was constituted by atoms, was governed by fate, beyond knowledge, etc., and promptly proceeded to expound, against the background of this world-view of theirs, how one rationally should live. Some later philosophers, such as Spinoza and Schopenhauer, clearly conform to this pattern.[1]

In the practice of contemporary philosophers, there remains little of this ambition to let *a practical philosophy of life*, that is, of how to live, emerge out of a theoretical understanding of general features of reality. Fundamental practical principles, for example, of utility or justice, are rather left standing on their own, without any metaphysical underpinning. Theoretical inquiries, on the other hand, are rarely rounded off by an attempt to assess what impact their outcome should have on one's way of life. Often such practical conclusions are not called for, since today philosophy is so diversified and specialized that an answer to many philosophical questions will not have any implications for the business of living. An understanding of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, of conditionals, of their role in the analysis of causation, of the relation between intention and desire, of the relation of proper names to definite descriptions, etc., surely harbours no notable practical implications.

All the same, there are some 'big' philosophical problems the solutions to which are not in this way practically neutral or innocent. Now, it is definitive of philosophy that it is

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[1] Cf. what John Cottingham has recently called the "synoptic" conception of ethics "as an integral part of a comprehensive philosophical system including both a scientific account of the physical world and a theory of human fulfilment" (1998: 14).

possible, within its boundaries, not only to try to solve these problems, but also to broach the question of the practical import of the solutions. Other scientific disciplines, for example theoretical physics, may deal with equally general problems (to some extent the same ones, for example about the nature of space and time). But philosophy is unique in encompassing both the theoretical and the practical dimension.

The very size and complexity of these fundamental problems of course constitute a formidable obstacle to letting an exploration of them issue in an appraisal of their practical import. This exploration itself is bound to consume so much time and energy that little may be left over for a 'derivation' of any practical precepts. Although this is a thick book, it is not nearly as thick as it would be if I were to do anything like full justice to the topics raised. So, the provisional character of the conclusions at which I arrive must be stressed. There could be no final word on how one should live in the light of philosophical truth or aware-ness of the general structure of the world, as knowledge and reflection constantly progress.

A further, more theoretical, reason for why there are few attempts to merge the theoretical and practical may be found in the widespread belief that an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'. As will transpire, I share some of the intuitions behind this dictum, in particular the intuition that no recognition of any facts could logically constrain one to adopt any conative or affective attitude to them. But, first, it could force one to *give up* some attitudes on pain of being irrational since, as we shall see in Part I, some attitudes comprise factual assumptions. Second, I cannot see why philosophy must confine itself to logical truths or inferences (as the logical positivists once prescribed). Philosophers could well avail themselves of empirical generalizations, whether recognized by common sense or by psychology. Such generalizations may support claims to the effect that human persons are so constituted that, given exposure to such and such facts, their conative or affective responses will be thus and so. It is legitimate for a philosophical inquiry to appeal to such generalizations since, I believe, the whole of human society and science relies on such contingent foundations.

To get down to a more specific level, the present essay is engaged in the enterprise of fusing the theoretical and the practical in seeking a general understanding of our nature as persons existing through time and intentionally shaping our existence, with a view to finding out what attitudes to our nature this understanding makes rational or gives us most reason to adopt. This exploration of the practical implications of philosophical the-ories might be called a (practical) philosophy of life. Its leading question is: 'In the light of philosophical truth, or the most general facts of reality, what do I have most reason to aim or strive for in my life?'

The Dilemma between Fulfilment and Rationality

In ancient Greece it was apparently often assumed that living rationally, in accordance with the philosophical truth about nature, would be to lead the happiest or most fulfilling or satisfying life. If so, the above life-philosophical question would have a single, unequi-vocal answer: 'In the rational way which is also the most satisfying'. As Martha Nussbaum has pointed out (1994: e.g. ch. 1), the ancient Greek philosophers frequently compared

philosophy to medicine: just as it is the physician's aim to restore patients to bodily health by the application of medical precepts, so philosophers should help patients to attain mental health and a fulfilling life by the application of reason and arguments. Among other things, she quotes an Epicurean definition of philosophy to this effect: "Philosophy is an activity that secures the flourishing [eudaimon] life by arguments and reasoning".[2] For instance, the Epicureans famously tried to show that the fear of death, which casts a long shadow over life, is irrational.

The present work, however, argues not merely that being rational, or living in the light of philosophical truth and reason, counteracts our aim for happiness in its actual form (whatever that precisely is), but that it counteracts it, *even if the latter aim be fully rationally constrained*. At least some ancient philosophers, like the Epicureans, seem to have had in mind in particular the aim for *one's own* happiness. But suppose that rationality obliges us to strive as much for the happiness of others (some may have assumed, falsely, that striving for our own happiness harmonizes with this striving). Then my claim is that making ourselves rational will not simultaneously turn us into efficient instruments to achieve this rationalized aim for happiness. This is so because many of our most entrenched attitudes will be seen to be irrational, and so the attempt to re-model ourselves according to the requirements of rationality will inevitably draw a lot of time and energy from the pursuit of the rationalized happiness aim. Thus, our irrationality is so deep and pervasive that the aim of removing it will conflict even with a rationally ironed out fulfilment aim.

This conflict raises the question of whether we have most reason to aim for satisfaction or for rationality—a question that may appear curious. For, on the one hand, it may seem evident that we have most reason to aim to be rational or to have only reason- or truth-based attitudes. On the other hand, it is a familiar idea that what we have most reason to do, or what is the rational thing to do, is that which maximizes satisfaction, especially in our own life.

The examination of the rationality of attitudes in Part II dissolves this air of paradox by distinguishing between rational attitudes in the sense, roughly, of attitudes being based on an adequate representation of everything there is reason to believe true, and attitudes that it is rational to have *given* this body of beliefs *and* certain intrinsic aims or desires, for example, an aim for fulfilment. These species of rationality will be called, respectively, the *cognitive* and the *relative* rationality of attitudes. Relative to a leading aim for fulfilment, it is rational to forbear from having cognitively rational attitudes that interfere with this aim. It is only relative to a master-aim to lead a rational life that, necessarily, it is rational to have any cognitively rational or truth-based attitude and no other.

In Part I I defend the claim that desires and emotions can be appraised as cognitively (ir)rational in the sense of being (in)compatible with what there is reason to think true, by showing that, apart from distinctive non-propositional ingredients, they necessarily have propositional contents of certain types. Because of this combination of features, they might be called 'para-cognitive' attitudes. The propositional content is also a precondition for the possession of these attitudes being assessable in terms of relative rationality.

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[2] 1994: 15; cf. Long and Sedley (1987: 156).

It may be that these propositional underpinnings of para-cognitive attitudes are contradicted by the picture of reality that emerges as the result of philosophical reflection or scientific research. This is actually rather likely in view of the fact that our most fundamental or ubiquitous attitudes seem either to be, or to be close relatives to, elements of an instinctual make-up shared with higher non-human animals. These attitudes will consequently be geared to the beliefs of creatures with an outlook much more restricted than our present one, and it would surely not be surprising if at least some of these beliefs were revealed to be false or untenable by our current, more scientific world-view. If so, these attitudes are cognitively irrational or illusion-based.

Nonetheless, it may be rational to continue to uphold these attitudes, relative to an aim for happiness, for example, an aim to lead the happiest life, if giving them up would be disturbing enough. Although most of us have the aim to be happy, I shall, however, argue that at least some of us also have as an intrinsic and ultimate aim, one that has been held to be especially appropriate for philosophers, namely the aim to live the (cognitively) rational life in accordance with truth and reason, to scrap beliefs we discover to be false or unfounded, and para-cognitive attitudes based on them. Given the latter aim, it will of course be irrational to stick to cognitively irrational attitudes. So we may be embroiled in a conflict: there may be ways of thinking and attitudes of ours such that it is both rational and irrational for us to retain them, relative to different aims of ours.

Those who possess a dominant intrinsic desire to exhibit only patterns of thought and attitudes that are cognitively rational will be named *rationalists*. Their opponents are *satisfactionalists*. We shall first come across the latter in the shape of *prudentialists*, who are equipped with the dominant, intrinsic aim that *their own* lives—viewed temporally neutrally if they are rational—be as fulfilling as possible.[3] For rationalists, it is (relatively) rational to try to extinguish even the most deeply ingrained attitudes that do not meet the desideratum of cognitive rationality, while this enterprise is (relatively) irrational for prudentialists if this makes their lives less fulfilling.

Now, we are neither pure rationalists nor pure prudentialists, but we have, to different degrees, a streak of both dispositions in us. Therefore we face in the philosophy of how to live a *conflict* or *dilemma* because, typically, we want *both* to think and react in fashions that have a solid basis in fact *and* to lead lives that are as happy or fulfilling as possible. It is not hard to understand why we should have been equipped with a desire to seek truth and form para-cognitive attitudes in conformity with it: clearly, in many situations, having this trait enhances our chances of survival. Generally, desires that have survival value—such as desires to acquire material possessions and to make some sort of impression upon our fellow beings—presuppose that we know our current situation in the world and will keep track of how our actions will change it. To the extent we thought we lacked such knowledge, we would desire to have it and to have it impregnate our attitudes. It is equally obvious that we desire felt satisfaction or pleasure. One way to

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[3] Prudentialism is a version of what Derek Parfit terms the *self-interest theory*, a version according to which its aim, that one's life go, for oneself, as well as possible, is analysed rather along the lines of what he calls *preference-hedonism* (1984: app. I).

gauge the importance of this desire is by noting that in most human cultures there is a practice of taking certain drugs to have pleasant, but delusory, experiences (albeit drugs can also be taken in an inquisitive spirit).

Granted that we seek pleasurable satisfaction, it might, however, be questioned whether we seek to *maximize* it, for example, seek to maximize the satisfaction of our lives. Is not our aim rather the more modest one of leading lives that are 'satisfying enough', on the lines of the 'satisficing' model advocated, for example, by Michael Slote (1989)? I agree that it is reasonable to adopt the satisficing model as regards *local* aims which compete with each other. Here the attempt to maximize the satisfaction one obtains from one aim may make one lose too much as regards other aims. But this reason for restraint does not apply to the overarching, global aim of life satisfaction. Thus, I cannot see any reason for aiming at less than maximization here (cf. Schmidtz, 1995: ch. 2).

For some, then, there is most reason to do what promotes the rational life, for others to do what promotes the most satisfying life. Those who adopt the former stance exemplify a form of *idealism*, in the sense that theirs is an aim that runs contrary to the prudentialist aim that one's own life be as satisfying as possible. Idealism can consist in the pursuit of other aims than rationality (e.g. artistic or athletic ones), but it is particularly apposite to consider the rationalist aim of living in the light of philosophical truth in the context of a quest for philosophical truth. Further, as will surface, this truth can significantly modify the satisfactionalist aim. But even a rationally modified satisfactionalism will turn out to be at odds with the aim to gain para-cognitive attitudes that are perfectly cognitively rational, though this clash compels these satisfactionalists to abandon their aim as little as rationalists are compelled to abandon their aim because it makes them more miserable than fulfilled. In compliance with one's individuality or personality, one may autonomously choose one lifestyle or the other. That is, there is room for an *individualism*, for one's individuality to express itself, in one's reply to the question of how one should live in the light of philosophical truth.

As implied, we shall first see this individualism at play in the intra-personal realm of *prudence*, in which the effects of one's actions only upon oneself are considered. Then we shall trace how it seeps into the inter-personal realm of *morality*, where this restriction is lifted, and consequences for other beings are taken into account. (But no full picture of morality is attempted.) I shall contend that, for the inter-personal domain, cognitive rationality lays down a demand of *personal neutrality* which rules out, first and foremost, one's being specially concerned about someone because that being is oneself. This requirement of course distances the aim to be rational from the prudentialist aim to maximize one's own satisfaction, but it might be thought to make the former aim an ally of the more rational satisfactionalist aim of maximizing the satisfaction of *all alike*. It will, however, be seen that this is not so, for, as the requirement of personal neutrality is based on the rational insignificance of personal identity, it permits individualism to extend beyond the intra-personal zone and invade the inter-personal one. It permits the pursuit of ideals, like rationalism, when this runs counter not only to the maximization of one's own fulfilment, but also to the maximization of the fulfilment of others.

An Objectivist or Subjectivist Framework?

I might be asked, however, whether there is not reason, for all, to rank highest either the rationalist or the satisfactionalist aim. If so, in the event of a conflict, we would all have reason to pursue the highest ranking one. In Part II, however, I argue that what is a reason for one depends on one's *desires*, in the end one's (ultimately) intrinsic desires. That is, I favour an *internalist* (or desire-based) account of reasons as opposed to an *externalist* one. Furthermore, I contend that *all* such desires provide reasons, that there is no *objective* requirement that such reasons have to meet to provide reasons.

In broad outline, the argument is this. Beliefs are designed to fit the facts of the world. This gives sense to the claim that there is something we are required to believe: the facts. Desires have the opposite direction of fit: they are formed to change the world so that *it* fits their content. For your desires to have this function, you are required to desire that which you can bring about. But that is all that is required by the direction of their fit. If you can bring it about that *p*, and can refrain from this, then it is unclear, in view of the fit of desire, what it could mean to say that you are required to desire one alternative rather than the other. For whatever you desire, there can be the requisite fit. On the other hand, if you cannot possibly bring it about that *p*, you are required not to desire to bring it about that *p*, since the requisite fit is ruled out. So, although you cannot be required to *have* any desire, there are desires you can be required *not* to have. In contrast, the fit of beliefs requires you to have beliefs that fit the facts rather than ones that do not.

Certainly, this does not amount to a conclusive proof that there is nothing that you are positively required to desire; it is well-nigh impossible to prove such a negative existential claim. But, due to the unclarity surrounding such requirements which, I conjecture, flows from their not being called for by the direction of fit of desires, these requirements, even if they exist, can probably never be so solidly established that they will possess enough authority to seriously challenge intrinsic desires widely shared, like the desires for truth and happiness. (They could exclude only desires that nobody will actually have, like Derek Parfit's Future-Tuesday-Indifference, to be discussed in Part III.) It is most likely that, according such requirements, both truth and happiness would come out as non-hierarchically ordered objectives, both of which we are required or permitted to desire. Otherwise, these requirements could scarcely earn credibility for, in the absence of considerations of fit, it seems that they have to earn their credibility by conforming to intrinsic desires that we already hold. Therefore, in relation to our fundamental para-cognitive attitudes, these requirements will have to be *compliant*, never *commanding*.

It follows that, with respect to our dilemma of rationalism and satisfactionalism, no appeal to objectivism will resolve it. Now, since I am at a loss to construe objectivism, and little would be gained for my purposes by assuming its truth, I shall proceed on the basis of the more parsimonious subjectivist assumption that there are no objective constraints on reason-grounding intrinsic desires. In any event, however, when the rationalist and a satisfactionalist life-style diverge, there is no reason valid for all, independently of the orientation of their intrinsic desires, to pursue one lifestyle rather than the other.

This subjectivism also defines (intrinsic) *value* in terms of what satisfies (ultimately intrinsic) desires. Accordingly, all values will in some sense be values *for* some subject (of desires). But we shall also be in need of a narrower notion of a value *for* a subject, in terms of which the fulfilment of those of one's desires that are in some sense *self-regarding*, but not, for example, those that are other-regarding, is good for oneself. I shall say that a desire is 'self-regarding' if the content of it contains an in a certain way ineliminable reference to the subject having the desire. In this sense, the prudentialist aim is self-regarding, since it is to the effect that *oneself* reap maximal fulfilment.

To say that one's desires are fulfilled does not imply that one *experiences* any fulfilment. Of course, if one desires to obtain certain experiences, for example of pleasure and pain (these experiences will be scrutinized in the first two chapters), one must necessarily have experiences of these kinds for one's desire to be fulfilled. Typically, when such desires are fulfilled, one will also be aware of this fact, and this will affect one's desire, so that it gives way to an experience of satisfaction or pleasure.

As opposed to this *experiential* kind of fulfilment, there is *a purely factual* notion of fulfilment consisting simply in that there is in fact something matching the object of a desire, and not entailing that the subject is aware of this fact. As it is doubtful whether we spontaneously desire a life that scores high with respect to factual fulfilment, I shall in speaking of the prudentialist aim of leading the maximally fulfilling life understand fulfilment in the experiential sense. (In practice, this may make little difference since, as will transpire, prudentialists will strive to have, as far as possible, desires that are experientially fulfilled whenever they are factually fulfilled.)

Psychological hedonism implies that all one's self-regarding (ultimately) intrinsic desires are to the effect that one obtain or avoid certain experiences, experiences that feature qualities of pleasure and pain, respectively. I argue in Part I that psychological hedonism is false and that there are self-regarding intrinsic desires for other things than one's own experiences, and consequently for other things than one's own hedonic experiences. There are also non-self-regarding intrinsic desires. To refute psychological hedonism may seem to be like shooting a dead duck, but it is worth doing since, as we shall see, its falsity supports the claim that it is not in any sense irrational to reject the aim of satisfactionalism, whether in the prudential or in the personally neutral shape, in favour of some ideal, like rationalism. For if one intrinsically desires other things than one's own pleasure, one may desire this more strongly than pleasure. Then one's master-aim may not be to make one's life as full of pleasure or (felt) satisfaction as possible, and we have seen that there is no objectivist, externalist norm requiring it to be so. Thus, to have as one's master-aim the rationalist aim that one's attitudes be as cognitively rational as possible is rationally permissible.

Ideals, like the rationalist aim, may or may not be self-regarding (as will emerge in Part IV, if they are self-regarding, they will have to be derivable from desires that do not refer to the subjects themselves if they are to be rationally defensible). But even a purely factual fulfilment of non-self-regarding desires is of value for subjects, in the broader, subjectivist sense. We may call this *impersonal* value in contrast to the *personal* value of something satisfying a self-regarding desire. Personal values are thus values *for* subjects in

a double sense. Pleasure is one thing of personal value for us, but not the only thing, since it is not the only thing we intrinsically desire to have.

Suppose that the rationalist desire to be cognitively rational rather than a prudentialist desire to lead the most fulfilling life is now one's dominant aim. Then what is now best for one may not be what is inter-temporally most fulfilling for one. There will be a clash if the rationalist aim demands the eradication of cognitively irrational attitudes whose eradication will decrease inter-temporal fulfilment, owing to the fact that they are so deeply rooted in our constitution. Parts III, IV, and V explore three such clashes between rationalism and a satisfactionalism that is gradually tightened up rationally.

Temporal Biases

Part III discusses whether *the temporal location* of things with value for us is of rational importance. Being persons, we are conscious of ourselves as subjects of experience and desire existing not only at the present time, but also in the past and the future and, consequently, of things being (in the broad sense) good and bad for us not only in the present, but also in the past and future. Now it is a well-known fact that, in appraising values located at different times, we display various biases, for example, we are spontaneously inclined to be *biased towards the near future* and to prefer a closer, smaller good to a more distant, greater good. Yet prima facie it seems cognitively irrational to regard such differences purely in timing as evaluatively significant. This impression is indeed borne out, but not by there being any underlying belief about temporal facts that philosophical analysis reveals to be cognitively irrational. The cause of the irrationality is instead that these facts induce us to represent things in distorted ways.

It follows that rationalists are obliged to rid themselves of the bias towards the near. It might seem that rational (as opposed to naïve) prudentialists would have to agree because they must be temporally neutral as regards their self-interest, as this bias is likely to make one's life on the whole worse by exaggerating the importance of some parts of one's life at the expense of other parts. Nonetheless, there is a conflict between rationalism and prudentialism for, as this bias is so deep-seated, it will not be relatively rational for prudentialists to embark upon the project of obliterating it completely.

Moreover, the bias towards the near is not the only temporal bias under which we labour: there is also *a bias towards the future* which upgrades the future in relation to the past. Since this bias cannot induce us to act contrary to the goal of a temporally neutral maximization of our own fulfilment, (rational) prudentialists have less of a reason to wish to be liberated from it. Rationalists are, however, obliged to extinguish it in order to attain the full temporal neutrality which is cognitively rational. This is likely to be a lifelong occupation which is detrimental to the aim of the inter-temporal maximization of one's own satisfaction. Therefore, as regards temporal attitudes, there is, given our actual psychology, a clash between what is the (relatively) rational course for rationalists and for (rational) prudentialists. Still, the rationalists' pursuit of temporal neutrality as an ideal in the sense of something to be pursued even when it runs counter to the inter-temporal

maximization of their own fulfilment is no less rationally permitted than this prudentialist pursuit. There is, then, in the intra-personal domain of prudence, no master-aim that all of us have most reason to adopt.

The Bias towards Oneself

A second region of strife, discussed in Part IV, is intimately related to the first one. When confronting the problem of the extent to which one's future good or satisfaction merits one's present concern, one will come up against not only the relevance of the fact of its temporal location, but also the relevance of the fact that it is *one's own*. Spontaneously, one is strongly disposed to be *biased towards oneself*, that is, one is more anxious to see to it that a desire be fulfilled if it is *one's own* rather than somebody else's. In this part I shall contend that an analysis of the concept of our identity through time reveals this difference to be without rational importance and, hence, this bias to be cognitively irrational. The bias towards oneself will, however, be seen to be based not directly on the thought that this fact of identity obtains, but on the exaggerated vividness of the representation of one's own future experiential states with which this thought is associated.

If so, the prudentialist aim of seeking to maximize the fulfilment of certain desires because they are one's own is cognitively irrational. Rational satisfactionalists will have to be personally neutral as well as temporally neutral. But, obviously, satisfactionalists cannot take on board personal neutrality and still remain prudentialists as they can take on board temporal neutrality. This change will instead turn them into *inter-personal* or *personally neutral* satisfactionalists whose aim is to maximize the fulfilment of *everyone's* desires. As regards personal partiality, there is then a head-on opposition between prudentialism and rationalism, while their opposition as regards temporal partiality is merely a result of the contingent fact that this partiality is so deeply rooted in our nature that it is counter-productive for prudentialists to try to dispose of it completely.

In the inter-personal sphere of morality, rationalism and personally (and temporally) neutral satisfactionalism are related to each other roughly as, in the intra-personal sphere of prudence, rationalism is related to (temporally neutral) prudentialism. Rationalists are committed to try to eradicate the bias towards oneself, however ravaging the psychological scars will be. In contrast, it will probably not be (relatively) rational for personally neutral satisfactionalists to try to completely wipe out this bias, since this elimination project may disturb their personality to the extent that they become less efficient in contributing to their goal. Still, it will probably be rational for them to 'trim' this bias. So there is a conflict between the rationalist and the satisfactionalist pursuit even if the latter is cognitively rationally constrained to the extent of incorporating not only temporal, but also personal, neutrality.

Again, this does not imply that we have more reason to choose one pursuit rather than the other. For rationalists, striving to have personally neutral attitudes is a legitimate ideal. As it is rationally permissible to be a rationalist idealist in the intra-personal domain of prudence, it is permissible to be so in the inter-personal sphere of morality. This

follows from my analysis of personal identity in the first half of Part IV which reveals it to be rationally insignificant. Since the distinction between ourselves and others is rationally insignificant, we may in the moral domain handle the life and desires of another (relevantly alike) individual as in the prudential domain we may rationally handle our own life and desires. For instance, as we may contravene the inter-temporal maximization of our own fulfilment in the name of some ideal, we may contravene the inter-temporal fulfilment maximization of another. In itself, the fact that it is another rather than oneself is irrelevant.

Hence, we see that the conflict between prudentialism and rationalism in the realm of prudence spills over into the moral realm. Individualism, having gained a foothold in prudence, can march into the moral domain as well, since personal identity is rationally unimportant. The fact that inter-personal maximization is not rationally required in the moral sphere or, alternatively expressed, that idealism is admissible, shows that a *moral individualism* is true. There is, in neither of these spheres, any aim that we all have most reason to adopt as there presumably would be if the aims of rationalism and satisfactionalism had coincided.

In the final chapters of Part IV, I shall say something about the resources we have to resolve the conflicts moral individualism allows. These resources have to do with the fact that we are mutually dependent upon each other and that we would not have survived as a species if our individual variations had been too great for co-operation to be possible. Such pressures may incline us to set aside our possible ideals in our dealings with others and promote their leading the sort of lives they at the present time autonomously choose, whether they be rationalists or satisfactionalists. But I do not try to establish that a consensus will result; the point is only that the cognitively rational requirement of personal neutrality does not imply that there is a single kind of life—not even if it is indeterminately specified as the kind of life they autonomously choose to lead—that we have most reason to have others leading. Our autonomy encompasses not only our own life, but extends to our handling of the lives of others. If, contrary to fact, the most fulfilling life were also cognitively rational, so that this life would be, for each of us, the one we ourselves had most reason to lead, it would also be the one we had most reason to have others leading.

Responsibility and Desert

Part V reviews a final conflict, regarding our attitudes with respect to *responsibility and desert*. A main contention is that, although our talk of responsibility to a considerable degree is compatible with determinism, it contravenes this doctrine by encapsulating claims of desert. A precondition for such claims being true of us is, I maintain, that we are self-determined in a sense that contradicts both indetermination and determination by causes external to our responsibility and control. It may appear that such an assumption of self-determination requires extravagant postulates about a self who can act as a 'first cause'. But I argue that it is of a more negative character, requiring merely an *absence* of causal speculation. This *epistemic* notion of self-determination is presupposed when

desert-related emotions such as anger and gratitude, pride and shame, admiration and contempt, envy, remorse, and feelings of guilt are felt. I also hypothesize that assessments of desert can be construed as outgrowths of such emotions, in particular, anger and gratitude.

But the notion of desert, so construed, is nothing that rationalists, who must relentlessly pursue causal inquiry, will employ, irrespective of whether determinism reigns in the realm of mind and action or there are gaps of indeterminism in it. It follows that rationalists are rationally constrained to give up thinking in terms of desert and exhibiting desert-related emotions. But it is evident that these emotions, like the biases towards the future and the near and towards ourselves, are engraved in the depth of our being, that it is hard to the point of being well-nigh impossible to erase them. Consequently, the stage is set for another collision between rationalism and satisfactionalism even if the latter aim be rationally cleansed.

We are, however, now brought to query whether satisfactionalism, thus cleansed, will in the inter-personal realm amount to an inter-personal (and inter-temporal) *maximization* of satisfaction or whether some distributive pattern must also be imposed. For the notion of desert is linked to that of *justice*: it is just to receive what one deserves, other things being equal. But it should not be taken for granted, as utilitarians traditionally appear to have done, that a rejection of desert means a rejection of justice. This is not so if there is a formal principle of justice laying down that a state is just if and only if individuals fare equally well, unless there are reasons, like deserts, making it just that they fare unequally well. If all such reasons for inequality lack application, the conclusion that follows is not that justice must be rejected, too, but that there is justice if and only if all fare equally well.

It is not part of the objective of this book to work out how egalitarian considerations should shape the goal of inter-personal maximization, to answer, for example, questions about when one inequality is worse than another and how to weigh sums of fulfilment against degrees of inequality in the distribution of it. The point is just to bring out that, if an egalitarian maximization to the effect of all being as equally well off as possible on as high a level as possible, unless they autonomously choose otherwise, is the result of rationalizing the goal of satisfactionalism, there will still be a tension between this goal and a rationalism which demands discarding all desert-related emotions along with the concept of desert. For the self-absorption and psychological disruption that the attempt at this removal involves will hinder the effective implementation of the goal of egalitarian maximization. So, in all likelihood, it is relatively rational for egalitarian maximizers to keep something of the desert-equipment, whereas it is rational for those who pursue rationalism as an ideal to try to weed it out completely.

The Two Meanings of 'Retreat of Reason'

Consider a person who succeeds in complying with the requirements of cognitive rationality, that is, a person who is not subject to temporal and personal biases and desert-related emotions. Such a person will be most like some sages and 'world-renouncers' depicted in

religious literature, perhaps especially of the East. It is suitable to speak of such a person as having entered a retreat, namely *a retreat of reason*. This provides one of the senses of the title of this book. But although this is the rational life, without cognitively irrational attitudes, we are not rationally required to adopt it. We are (relatively) rationally required to strive for this sort of life given that we are in the grip of a dominant rationalist desire, but not, for example, if our main aim is that of satisfactionalism, even if this aim be rationally regimented—and there is nothing making us rationally required to have one leading aim rather than the other.

Given even a master-aim of rationally purified satisfactionalism, it will not be rational to fully internalize the requirements of temporal and personal neutrality and to dispose of the concept of desert and related emotions. There is a point at which it will be rational relative to this aim to, so to speak, let reason retreat or withdraw, to restrain the quest for knowledge and/or cease to dwell upon truths with a mind to having them impregnate one's para-cognitive attitudes. This constitutes the other sense of 'the retreat of reason', namely that of reason retreating (from the ruling position in one's personality). The extent of this withdrawal of reason will vary in relation to how rationally regimented satisfactionalism is—for example whether it be prudentialist and incorporates only temporal neutrality, or it incorporates personal neutrality and a rational conception of justice, as well—but the withdrawal will never shrink to nothing.

The chief objective of the present essay is to display that rationalism diverges from satisfactionalism or the pursuit of fulfilment or happiness, even if the latter pursuit is rationally regimented, and to contend that, despite this conflict, neither aim is irrational. A consequence of this dilemma is that, in the intra-personal sphere of prudence, there is no kind of life that everyone has best reason to have. Nor is there, in the inter-personal sphere of morality, any kind of life that we all have best reason to see others have (such as, the kind of life that contains as much satisfaction as possible, compatibly with as equal a distribution between lives as possible). To be rational in the inter-personal or moral domain is not necessarily to be a philanthropist, a do-gooder, who aims to do what is best and just for others; it may take the idealist shape of a more intellectual, philosophical life, also aimed at making one's para-cognitive attitudes concord with truth.

My presentation of this dilemma shows that it arises even if one affirms a view of the world that is completely 'naturalistic' in the sense that everything in the world can be described by empirical science, so that, for instance, there are no non-empirical selves to which we are identical and which (non-deterministically) direct our actions, and no values irreducible to natural phenomena such as para-cognitive attitudes. As already remarked, I do not think that naturalism with respect to value is necessary for the dilemma to arise. For, even if there were some objective requirements of practical rationality, it is most unlikely that they would rank the aims of rationalism and satisfactionalism relative to each other. More likely, they would sanction, in a non-hierarchical fashion, both of these aims, as well as any other widespread aims—or suffer a fatal loss of authority or credibility.

We would not be in this predicament if a life in harmony with philosophical truth and reason did not necessitate a major attitudinal reform. It is seemingly often taken for

granted that the cognitive groundings of our fundamental para-cognitive attitudes must be more or less sound. Then it could scarcely be so hard for us to make rationally required adjustments that it could wreak havoc on our rational satisfactionalist aims. But I believe that this comfort—offered by various forms of ethical intuitionism—is denied us: philosophical explorations can reveal our most deep-rooted attitudes to be radically misguided. The persistence of the self through time and its self-determination do not meet the standards the justifiability of these attitudes calls for. The cognitive irrationality of our para-cognitive attitudes is so profound and large-scale that eradicating it will be at odds with even a completely rationalized satisfactionalist aim. Hence, if reason does not retreat from controlling our attitudes, it will force us to retreat from these attitudes.