

HOWARD L.M. NYE

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Michigan, 2003 – 2009 (Expected)

Dissertation: *Ethics, Fitting Attitudes, and Practical Reason: A Theory of Normative Facts*

Committee: Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton (Co-Chairs), Stephen Darwall (Yale),
William Gehring (Psychology)

B.A., Columbia University, 2003, *Summa Cum Laude*, Phi Beta Kappa. Economics and
Philosophy majors, Mathematics minor

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Metaethics, Moral Psychology, Normative Ethics

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Political Philosophy, Applied Ethics, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Language,
Philosophy of Economics

WORK UNDER SUBMISSION

“Morality, Fitting Attitudes, and Reasons for Action”

“Norm Descriptivism: An Account of Normative Guidance and Inquiry” (with John Ku)

“Normative Acceptance and Fitting Attitudes”

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND HONORS

University of Michigan

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship, 2008-2009

Philosophy Department Candidacy One-Term Fellowship, Winter 2008

Rackham One-Term Dissertation Fellowship, Fall 2007

Columbia University

Arthur Rose Senior Year Teaching Assistantship, 2002-2003

David Estabrook Romine Prize in Economics, 2002

Columbia Human Rights Concentration Prize, 2002

Adam Leroy Jones Prize in Logic, 2001

PRESENTATIONS

12th Annual Oxford Philosophy Graduate Conference: “Fitting Attitudes, Reasons for Action, and the Rejection of Consequentialism” (with John Ku and David Plunkett), 2008

First Annual Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress: “Fitting Attitudes, Reasons for Action, and the Rejection of Consequentialism” (with John Ku and David Plunkett), 2008

Southeast Graduate Philosophy Conference: “Norm Descriptivism: An Account of Normative Guidance and Inquiry” (with John Ku), 2008

Southwest Graduate Conference in Philosophy: “Norm Descriptivism: An Account of Normative Guidance and Inquiry” (with John Ku), 2008

Invited Presentation, Ethics Discussion Group: “Why We Are Not Consequentialists” (with John Ku), 2007

Eighth Annual CMU/Pitt Graduate Student Conference: “Norm Descriptivism: From ‘Is’ to ‘Ought’” (with John Ku), 2006

American Philosophical Association, Central Division: “Commentary on Joseph Millum’s ‘Moral Realism and Natural Kinds’,” 2005

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Michigan

Graduate Student Instructor:

Contemporary Moral Problems. Instructor: Daniel Jacobson. Winter 2007

Philosophical Ethics. Instructor: Stephen Darwall. Fall 2006

Political Philosophy. Instructor: Elizabeth Anderson. Winter 2005

Law and Philosophy. Instructor: Elizabeth Anderson. Fall 2005

Introduction to Philosophy. Instructor: James Joyce. Winter 2005

Introduction to Philosophy. Instructor: James Woodbridge. Fall 2004

Guest Lecturer:

Contemporary Moral Problems. Instructor: Daniel Jacobson. Lecture Topic: Jeff McMahan on Moral Obligations to Non-Human Animals. Winter 2007

Ethical Analysis. Instructor: Allan Gibbard. Lecture Topics: Ewing and Brandt on Fitting Attitude Analyses, The Ideal Response Theories of Firth and Brandt. Fall 2004

Columbia University

Teaching Assistant:

Science and Religion. Instructor: Philip Kitcher. Fall 2002

Epistemology. Instructor: John Collins. Spring, 2003

Guest Lecturer:

Science and Religion. Instructor: Philip Kitcher. Lecture Topic: Clifford and the Ethics of Belief. Fall, 2002

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

Ethics

Ethical Analysis, Allan Gibbard
Empirical Research and Metaethics, Allan Gibbard
Evolution and Morality*, Allan Gibbard, Peter Railton, and Chandra Sripada (Psychiatry)
Philosophy and Economics, Frank Thompson (Economics)
History of Ethics, Stephen Darwall
The Second Person Standpoint, Stephen Darwall
Recent Works in Contemporary Ethics, Elizabeth Anderson
Topics in Metaethics, David Velleman
Deliberation and Normative Facts, Candidacy Reading Course, Peter Railton
Sentimentalist Metaethical Theories*, Daniel Jacobson (Bowling Green)

Philosophy of Mind, Language, and Logic

Philosophy of Language, James Tappenden
Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein*, Ian Proops
Meaning and Normativity*, Allan Gibbard
Concepts and Conceptual Change*, David Braddon-Mitchell (Sydney)
Proseminar in Philosophy of Language and Science, Peter Railton and Jason Stanley
Mathematical Logic, Lawrence Sklar

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Topics in Epistemology*, Jason Stanley
Metaphysics of Modality*, Boris Kment
Causation, Explanation, and Counterfactuals*, Boris Kment

History

Aristotle, Rachana Kamtekar
Philosophy of John Dewey*, Elizabeth Anderson

* Audit

REFERENCES

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Elizabeth Anderson (Teaching Reference)

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**ETHICS, FITTING ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICAL REASON: A THEORY OF NORMATIVE FACTS
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

What is it for ethical judgments to be correct? How can we determine the right answers to ethical questions? Ethical facts can seem problematic: they look unnecessary for explanations, and ethical judgments appear more closely connected to motivation than (other) factual judgments. Related problems concern the relationship between ethics and reasons for action. These include explaining why we should be moral and determining whether it could be rational to act immorally. I offer an account of ethical judgments that seeks to solve these problems. On my account, ethical judgments are judgments about our reasons, and judgments about an agent's reasons are judgments about the prescriptions of the most fundamental norms she accepts. This explains how ethical judgments are intimately related to motivation but still about descriptive facts, and vindicates our standard philosophical methods of ethical inquiry. It also explains why ethical facts entail that we have certain reasons, including conclusive reasons not to do wrong.

I argue that we can analyze ethical concepts in terms of the rationality of specific motivationally laden attitudes. For instance, we can analyze an act's moral wrongness in terms of our having reason to feel obligated not to perform it, and we can analyze a state of affairs' goodness in terms of our having reason to desire that it obtains. I proceed to argue that having reason to perform an act is a matter of the act's satisfying a rational motive. Since ethical judgments are judgments that certain motives are rational, and rational motives determine rational actions, ethical judgments entail that we have certain reasons for action. I apply this strategy to show that an act's moral wrongness entails overriding reason not to perform it.

I proceed to offer an analysis, which I call 'Norm Descriptivism', of the concept of *having reason to have an attitude or perform an action*. On this analysis, to judge that an agent has reason to have a certain response is to judge that the most fundamental norms she accepts prescribe that she have it. What is prescribed by the norms one accepts is a descriptive matter of fact that one can access by constructing a best explanation of one's intuitions about what to do, think, and feel. At the same time, one only counts as accepting a norm if representations that the norm prescribes a response tend to cause one to have the response.

A well known difficulty with analyzing ethical concepts in terms of rational attitudes is that some reasons for attitudes seem to be of the wrong kind. Suppose, for instance, that an evil demon will harm your loved ones unless you desire that you have an even number of hairs on your body. This might seem to give you a kind of reason to desire a state in which you have an even number of hairs, but it does not make the state good. I point out that an intuitive difference between the right and wrong kind of reasons is that judgments about the former can have a direct effect on our attitudes. I use my Norm Descriptivist analysis of reasons to explain this intuitive difference and to solve the problem of distinguishing the right from the wrong kind of reasons.

According to Norm Descriptivism, having reason to respond in a certain way is a matter of one's being able to reason one's way to the response correctly. I argue that this best explains why "ought implies can" and why only deliberating agents are subject to reasons. Norm Descriptivism also explains how judgments about reasons are descriptive beliefs that essentially guide attitudes. Most descriptivist accounts of judgments about reasons cannot adequately explain how they guide our responses. On the other hand, accounts of these judgments on which they are non-cognitive states seem unable to explain what we are doing when we inquire into what our reasons are. I argue that only Norm Descriptivism can successfully explain both how judgments about reasons guide attitudes and what inquiry into reasons amounts to.