



# Charting the Landscape of Reason

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*Stanford University*

*Presidential address delivered at the ninety-first  
annual Pacific Division meeting of the American  
Philosophical Association*

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*Presidential Address delivered at the ninety-first Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Seattle, WA, on April 14, 2017.*

Over the long sweep of history, human collectivities have configured themselves in many ways, successively taking up and casting off a vast array of ways of life, cultural practices, political and economic systems, and much more besides. We have tried on authority-driven, pre-scientific cultures only to cast them off for cultures more committed to scientific rationality. We've constructed cultures around identities rooted in the primacy of kin, clan, or tribe. But we have also haltingly embraced cultures devoted to more cosmopolitan ideals. In this essay, I reflect on the structure and dynamics of this sprawling, variegated, ever-evolving cultural landscape. I ask whether and to what extent it can rightly be viewed as the work product of human reason.

My approach to this question draws initial inspiration from Aristotle, who defined humankind as the rational animal. Aristotle was right on two fronts. Reason is a distinctively *human* capacity. And we humans are mere animals. I propose to take Aristotle's insight utterly seriously. I will argue that the animality of human reason sits uneasily with a broadly rationalist conception of reason's nature and destiny, particularly its role in shaping the dynamics and topology of the cultural landscape.<sup>1</sup> A broadly rationalist conception of reason would have it that when reason is properly deployed, it is intrinsically fit to direct us toward the true and the good. The rationalist can, of course, allow that specifying just what the proper deployment of reason consists in is no mean or simple task. She can also allow that reason sometimes finds itself hostage to the winds of mere fortune, especially when evidence, time, and resources are limited.<sup>2</sup> And even when the winds of fortune do not turn reason from the path of the true and the good, she will say we may fail, of our own accord, to deploy reason rightly. We are finite, fallible creatures and there is no guarantee that reason will always be in full control of the

gears of the human mind. So even one who regards reason as our only sure guide to the true and the good can allow that we are sometimes moved not by the force of the better reason, but by various forces of unreason. These forces include but certainly are not limited to distorting passions, motivated or self-deceptive thinking, superstition, prejudice, and cognitive biases of a vast variety.<sup>3</sup> And when the gears of the mind are moved by such dark forces, we are liable to errors and illusions. This catalog of the vulnerabilities of our minds to the forces of unreason allows even the rationalist to grant that belief in the true and pursuit of the good are not always and already achieved, rational animals though we may be. Indeed, she may even allow that many archaic cultures of the past were founded on just such errors and illusions. Still, despite acknowledging our vulnerabilities, the rationalist will insist that we must not underestimate reason. We must not allow the fact that the force of the better reason is sometimes blunted within or is tripped up by ill fortune to blind us to reason's true nature. Properly deployed, in favorable circumstances, the true intrinsic destiny of reason remains to direct us toward belief in the true and pursuit of the good. From this perspective, the fact that the cultural landscape is littered here and there with the detritus of error and illusion is but a testament to the long-run triumph of reason over unreason, since reason will eventually sweep all the detritus left by unreason away.

I aim to contest this optimistic assessment of the role of reason in sculpting the topology and dynamics of the cultural landscape. I offer a competing picture of reason and its powers—though without claiming to settle the competition here. Exactly what I do hope to achieve in these pages depends on where you begin. If you are a neutral agnostic, my goal is to tilt the balance of the competing considerations just enough to convince you that there is more to be said against and less to be said for the broadly rationalist picture than you might have antecedently imagined. If you are a committed fellow traveler, I hope to bolster your positive convictions and to arm you with what I flatter myself are new arguments for our side. Finally, if you are a rationalist, I hold out little hope of persuading you. I do hope to awaken you from any dogmatic slumber, to sound an alarm, and to alert you that the contest is still on.

I aim to undermine optimistic assessments of the intrinsic power and ultimate destiny of reason and to replace it with a more sobering assessment. But I do not come to blame reason. Neither do I come to praise it. My attitude is one of detached equanimity. This is the sort of attitude that might befit a naturalistic Martian Philosophical Anthropologist, sent to planet Earth to observe and explain. In that guise, we may imagine ourselves armed with something like total natural

science, from fundamental physics, through evolutionary biology, and a completed cognitive science. We will also deploy the descriptive and explanatory resources of dynamic systems theory. Using these tools, we seek to survey and to chart the spatially sprawling, temporally extended, ever-evolving cultural landscape. It is important that from our detached anthropological perch, we will be casting no normative assessments upon the various local configurations through which human reason and culture may happen to walk. Our explanatory aim is to chart these configurations in both their synchronic and diachronic rational relations one to another and to the sprawling landscape considered in its totality, but without endorsing any normative or justificatory story about its dynamic unfolding.<sup>4</sup>

Though we come merely to observe and explain, nothing prevents us from acknowledging that reason is a powerful instrument—mere animal capacity though it may be. Reason grounds much that is distinctively human—from our distinctive forms of social, political, and moral life, to our impressive cognitive achievements in science, mathematics, and philosophy. But the achievements of reason have not come as the result of a relentless forward march. Our actual historical walk through the space of possible configurations of reason and culture has, on my view, involved much blind stumbling about, often into cul-de-sacs of error and illusion. To be sure, reason's blind stumbling has sometimes been leavened by strokes of good fortune. And these strokes of good fortune have often been consolidated into a greater hold on the true and the good. From our normatively detached perspective, both the blind stumbling and the opportunistic consolidations should be taken to have full and equal claim to being the work of reason. If so, then the rational landscape is revealed as one populated not only by monuments to the success of reason, but also by relics of its failure.

To carry out our cartographic mission, we need some measuring tools. The first is the notion of a dialectical cohort.<sup>5</sup> A dialectical cohort is a human collectivity, localized over some region of post-evolutionary time and cultural space, such that the members of that cohort are "rationally interanimating" in the sense that they share certain modes of reasoning, with these modes of reason functioning to sustain the cohort as a cohort.  $X$  and  $y$  count as members of the same cohort if  $x$  has the capacity to engage  $y$  by modes of reasoning that move  $y$  in ways that also move  $x$ ;  $y$  has the same capacity with respect to  $x$ ; and  $x$  and  $y$  mutually endorse the relevant modes of reasoning as "authoritative."<sup>6</sup> Distinct dialectical cohorts may be knitted together as cohorts by distinct modes of reasoning. Forms of reasoning that knit together pre-scientific, pre-literate, or pre-philosophical cohorts may differ from forms of reasoning

that knit together more advanced or refined cohorts. Within a single cohort, intellectual “progress” may give rise to new or refined forms of reasoning and reflection. When change of this sort happens, a new form of reasoning may come to play the knitting-together role. When the members of a cohort jointly evolve such a new form of reasoning, it may move as a cohesive cultural unit through configuration space. But dialectical cohorts may also fragment and divide. Some but not others in the given cohort may take up the new forms. Once tightly knit cohorts may fragment into reactionary and progressive subcohorts who no longer enjoy a meeting of the dialectical ways. Out of such partings of the dialectical ways, new arrays of dialectical cohorts may constitute themselves. Although dialectical cohorts tend to be collectivities, at the very extreme a single subject may form a cohort of one. A single subject may even count simultaneously as a member of multiple dialectical cohorts, with each sustained by a different mode of reasoning. Because of the multiplicity of the ways in which dialectical cohorts may be constituted, we, in our detached equanimity, must be prepared to find that the internal normative lights of reason may be distributed and diverse.

Our initial characterization of dialectical cohorts has been from a high perch. Zooming closer in, one cohort can be distinguished from another by their internal normative fine structures. The normative fine structure of a cohort will be determined by the set of background theories, epistemic principles, rules of inference, cognitive dispositions, values, and so on by which the cognition and connotation of its inhabitants are normatively regulated. Normative fine structures generate reasons and mediate the propagation of warrant both within individual agents and from agent to agent. Normative fine structure will determine which beliefs count as reasonable given what evidence, which further beliefs are rationalized by which initial beliefs, which plans or intentions are supported by which values and commitments, and which courses of action it is reasonable to pursue given which plans or intentions. Shared normative fine structures subserve the transmission of reasons from agent to agent and thus undergird and sustain inter-agential engagement. They thereby play essential roles in knitting human collectivities into rational or normative communities in which the rational powers of one may become rational resources for all.

When I say that normative fine-structures generate reasons and propagate warrant, I do not refer to so-called “external” reasons or “objective” warrant. In fact, I doubt that coherent metaphysical sense can ultimately be made of these notions—at least not to the extent that standing as an external reason is thought to be determined entirely

independently of facts about internal normative fine structure.<sup>7</sup> Nor do I refer to warrant or reasons as measured by our own detached Martian normative lights. What we seek to investigate are the normative illuminations cast in various directions by the native inhabitants of the human rational landscape, in all their manifold relations one to another, to the extent that they are ratified or resisted by the members of this or that cohort. The sort of reasons and warrant the generation and propagation of which we are attempting to understand are thus purely internal reasons and warrant.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere I say a great deal more about normative fine structures, including their psychological and social roles, their metaphysical natures, their normative significance, and their roles in both individual and collective self-configuration and self-governance.<sup>9</sup> I will not recapitulate the details of that larger story here. A brief example should suffice to convey a rough feel for my approach. Consider the attitude of valuing.<sup>10</sup> Valuing is a distinctive psycho-functional state of the human mind, one which plays both a central causal-functional role in normal human psychology and a central normative role in the generation of reasons. Suppose I value the well-being of my child. I am thereby causally disposed to behave toward my child in certain ways. I also have pro-tanto reason to perform the very actions that my valuing disposes me to perform. Absent my valuing, I might lack both motivation and reason to behave in that very way. Notice that I said “might” rather than “would.” Normative fine structures generate reasons in any number of ways. And other elements of my normative fine structure might generate reasons to behave in the relevant way, even if I did not value my child. The crucial point, though, is that valuing enjoys a distinctive sort of normative power. It is one thing for it to be true that doing such and such would promote the well-being of my child. It is another thing entirely for that consideration to amount to a reason for me to do such and such. It is my valuing that takes the otherwise normatively mute consideration and yields a reason, at least a reason for me.<sup>11</sup>

Now, the reasons that are generated from this or that combination of a valuing and a consideration may vary in weight. Weights will often depend on the location and role of the relevant value in an overall normative fine structure. For example, some of an agent’s values may be bound up with ground level, identity-constituting projects. Through ground-level, identity-constituting projects, an agent undertakes to make herself into a determinate being in the human world, with a thick identity, partly defined by a network of commitments, attachments, and values. When values are bound up with such projects, they tend to generate reasons of a very weighty kind—what I call reasons experienced

as coterminous with the self. A reason is experienced as coterminous with the self for an agent if her failure to act on it would be tantamount to self-alienation. If there are such reasons, they are no doubt weighty. But this is not the place to settle exactly how weighty they really are. I am not prepared to say, for example, whether such reasons do or do not trump all other reasons. Perhaps, for all I shall argue here, specifically moral reasons, if there are any such things, play such a foundational role in the configuration of any permissible rational self that they manage to override reasons that might otherwise be experienced by an agent as coterminous with herself. Perhaps Kant thought something along this line. Or perhaps he would have said that something goes wrong from the start when reasons that are at odds with morality are experienced as coterminous with the self. If one can even succeed in configuring oneself in that way, one has somehow constituted one's self in a rationally impermissible way. Perhaps such rationally impermissible selves have duties of self-alienation. Or perhaps Kant would say that such a would-be self is not fully and truly a self, but only a sham and a shadow of what a true self should be.<sup>12</sup> I doubt that this Kantian thought is correct or that it is at all true to our ordinary understanding of what it takes to enjoy selfhood.<sup>13</sup> Though Hitler was no paragon of virtue or morality, his problems were not, I think, rooted in a failure to pull off acts of self-constitution. But I will not stop to argue with Kantians here. I will just say that if moral reasons either override reasons that would otherwise be experienced as coterminous with the self or, perhaps, block the very generation of such reasons in the case of "defective" or sham selves, then moral reasons must be very weighty reasons indeed. Since they would then be plausibly capable of requiring self-alienation of a self or of preventing certain kinds of selves from even coming into being, it is fair to wonder from where in the natural order of things reasons, so conceived, could possibly come from and how they could possibly have such a commanding hold on us, to the extent that we are creatures who are or aspire to be selves.

Not all elements of a normative fine structure will generate weighty reasons. Not all values, for instance, are tied up with things fundamental to our self-constitution. Some things that one values, one values only lightly. Suppose that one values one's own comfort and ease. That may give one pro-tanto reason to take various actions to secure them. Valuing comfort and ease does not mean that there are no things, persons, or causes that one values more. Precisely when one values comfort and ease only lightly, can it be the case that when the chips are down, and things of greater consequence are at stake, one will have countervailing reasons of significantly greater weight to sacrifice one's comfort and ease.

I have said little about where values come from and have only hinted at the full story of whence they achieve their reason-giving force. I lack the space to do adequate justice to such questions here. But I will note that it is crucial to my view of such matters that human normative fine structure, including the psychic capacity to value, is built into the evolved architecture of the human mind-brain. It is because of that evolved architecture that we humans are what I call norm-and-value-mongering animals. Find an animal that mongs after no norms, that values nothing, that altogether lacks any psychic normative fine structure, and that animal will not, I submit, be recognizably human. That is why Aristotle was precisely right to call humankind the rational animal. The psychic capacity to monger values and norms, and to causally guide and normatively govern ourselves in accordance with the values and norms that we monger, is precisely what the merely animal capacity of human rationality consists in.

Although we are evolved to monger norms and values, we do not find or discover the values that we monger, as if they were always and already present in the universe, independently of anything that we do or are. Independently of the existence within it of value-mongering creatures like ourselves, the world is laden with fact, but not yet with value. If we are to successfully monger after value in a value-free world, one laden with nothing but fact, we must somehow manage to create the values that we monger. This we do, I suggest, simply by engaging in the merely human, entirely natural animal activity of valuing things. In valuing things, we take things to matter. In taking things to matter, we make them matter. We make them really and truly matter—at least to ourselves. And if this is right, human valuing may be thought to both precede and explain having value.

To say that our valuing precedes and explains having value is not quite to say that we create value *ex nihilo*. Even in a world laden with nothing but fact, valuing can still be understood as a kind of responsiveness to the world. A world not yet laden with value may still afford, in virtue of its fact-laden nature, value-mongering creatures opportunities to exercise their capacity to value. A value-affordance differs from an antecedently existing value in something like the way an invitation differs from a command.<sup>14</sup> Antecedently existing values might be thought to command the will by impressing reasons from without upon it. Value affordances exercise no such power over the will. They invite the will rather than command the will. When an agent responds to such an invitation by, in fact, valuing what she has been invited to value, it comes to occupy a place in her normative fine structure. She thereby promotes it into a source of reasons.

Partly because of the way the world is, partly, and more importantly, because of the way we are, the world is present to us as teeming with the affordance of value. Because of our evolved nature, as value-mongering creatures, we come to the world antecedently poised to exploit such opportunities to value as the world offers up. To appreciate the relative contribution of our own nature and the nature of the world to the generation of value, consider a dog and its owner out for a walk on a hot summer's day. They come across a tree. The two animals are antecedently poised to engage with the tree in two quite different ways. Consequently, the tree may afford the dog the opportunity to mark territory, while it may afford the man the opportunity to escape the sun's rays. Independently of the existence of animals poised to engage with it in certain ways, it would be a mistake to conclude that the tree is intrinsically laden with value. There would be neither theoretical nor practical utility in concluding that the tree is either intrinsically valuable for territory-marking or intrinsically valuable as a provider of shade.

For creatures like ourselves, navigating a world that affords boundless opportunities to value is among our most urgent tasks—both as individuals and as collectivities. So long as we are destined to live lives that are recognizably human, it is a task that we have no realistic possibility of foreswearing. To foreswear the task of navigating a world laden with nothing but fact, but teeming in its presentation to us with affordances of value, would be to abandon the very project of constituting ourselves as human beings in a human world. In taking up or refusing the world's many invitations to value, we not only configure our identities as human individuals among other human individuals, we array ourselves collectively into normative communities of various kinds. This, I submit, is just part of the work that reason, in its distributed and divided way, has shouldered, with varying degrees of success and failure, in its relentless sculpting of the rational landscape.

Because value affordances invite rather than command, it is hardly surprising that both individuals and cohorts may take up or refuse different total packages of such affordances. Different total packages of values and norms are markers of the different ways in which reason has configured itself locally. What we seek to know, from our detached perch, is not who has the normatively right or best total package, but how radically, along what dimensions, for what reasons, and with what normative consequences cohorts may differ from one another in the packages they take on. Settling these matters is beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>15</sup> But it is worth noting various possible ultimate outcomes of our inquiries. On the one hand, we may discover that there is a set of universal constraints that all humanly possible normative fine structures

must satisfy—in much the way that linguists who believe in Universal Grammar suppose that there is a set of universal constraints that all humanly possible languages must satisfy. Universal constraints on humanly possible normative fine structure, if they exist, may provide a degree of scaffolding, thick or thin, within which some degree of variance in fine structures is still possible. The thinner the scaffolding, the more possible normative fine structures may vary. The thicker the scaffolding, the less they may do so. If there are such constraints, we will ultimately need to determine where they come from. They are perhaps most likely to be built into the fundamental architecture of the mind, presumably by natural selection.

Our detached equanimity positions us to chart the landscape from a decentered, non-partisan vantage point, without antecedent assumptions about which of the extant fine structures deserves to be privileged over others. We cannot expect the same detachment of the native inhabitants of the landscape themselves. The members of any given dialectical cohort are unlikely to construe alternative configurations as normatively on a par with their own. They are likely to illuminate the entire history and dynamics of reason from their own perspective via their own partisan normative lights, as if they themselves occupied the center of the landscape. When illuminated in a one-sided way by the centered and partisan normative lights of a given cohort, some of the many alternative local configurations of reason will be present to the members of the illuminating cohort as exemplars of cognitive or moral virtue, while others will be present as exemplars of cognitive or moral vice. Moreover, what one cohort construes as cognitive or moral virtue, others may construe as cognitive or moral vice. From our perspective of detached, decentered equanimity, the various normative illuminations cast this way and that by the many native dialectical cohorts are just further facts on the ground. We take those illuminations as further features of the sprawling landscape the dynamics and topology of which we seek to chart and explain.

At the start of our inquiries, we bestow no antecedent privilege on any one of the native cohorts or their normative illuminations. Over the course of our inquiries, we do, however, seek to discover which, if any, locations in the landscape represent stable equilibria in configuration space and which, if any, enjoy large basins of attraction. For example, we might eventually discover that however political structures start out initially arrayed, they are subject to relentless pressure, across all possible human normative fine structures, to evolve over time toward more democratic and egalitarian forms of political life. Democratic egalitarian forms would then be revealed as dynamically favored

and to enjoy large basins of attraction. There might be certain other configurations of political life that are hard to evolve such that where they do evolve, they are almost invariably thrown off. We hope and expect to discover a plethora of such regularities over the course of our inquiries. Caution will be required in interpreting such discoveries, since there is no guarantee that dynamically favored configurations are *ipso facto* more "rational" than less dynamically favored ones. To reach that conclusion, we would need to know a great deal more than the mere fact that they are dynamically favored. For example, we would need to know the extent to which the evolution of the landscape over time was governed by the free operation of reason alone, rather than at least partly by extra-rational factors, like power or chance. We refrain from prejudging such questions. But we do not forswear the very attempt to determine where the free operation of reason begins and ends.

If human reason is a distinctive causal power in nature, it must somehow be distinguishable from other natural powers. One of our goals will therefore be to ferret out the distinctive causal signature of reason at work. There are several potential sources of insight available to us in our attempt to demarcate reason, considered as a natural power, from other natural powers. One is the trajectory of the rational landscape itself. Arguably, the more grounds that we have for concluding that the settling of the rational landscape into a given equilibrium point is path-independent, the more likely it will be that it represents a point of rational convergence such that rational cognizers and actors, just to the extent that they are driven by reason, independently of various extra-rational forces, will, in the fullness of time, settle on that equilibrium point, however radically their precise trajectories through configuration space may differ from one another. In that case, we may expect to find an invariant trace of reason at work across many different configurations of the landscape. But it is important to caution here that whether there are one, many, or no such points of rational convergence is an issue that cannot be settled in advance.

In addition to charting the internal contours of the rational landscape, we also seek to locate its outer boundaries. This requires that we eventually distinguish, at one extreme, where reason shades off into remnants of reasons, where these may be characteristic of certain broken brains and dysfunctional minds. Here, an important clue may come from isolated cohorts, spatially embedded in larger communities, but with limited access to the means of more thoroughgoing dialectical engagement with those larger communities. As always, caution is required. Lack of dialectical engagement may simply be a marker of the inaccessibility of one point in configuration space from some other

point in configuration space rather than a sign that we have reached the landscape's boundary. At the other extreme, we need to distinguish mere precursors of reason—of the sort that are characteristic of certain not yet rational animals—from reason fully formed. Here, again, caution is in order. The boundary between reason and its precursors may be vague, indeterminate, and shifty. It may also be sharp, well defined, and fixed. We cannot say in advance.

A further and deep challenge is to determine the extent of reason's fragmentation or unity. The fact that the native inhabitants of the landscape come arrayed in many and diverse dialectical cohorts, with many different normative fine structures, already suggests that reason must be, at least to some degree, fragmented. But we must not draw any premature conclusions until we have more fully charted the overall landscape and have more fully plumbed the deep psychology of reason. Perhaps a few large attractors dominate the landscape. Perhaps many and diverse attractors compete for local dominance of this or that subregion of rational space. The fewer attractors, the less fragmented we may take reason to be. The more attractors, the more fragmented it may be. The deep psychology of our rational powers may also provide important clues. If our rational powers are ultimately grounded in a unified psychic capacity that enables reason to function in the manner of a Cartesian universal instrument, we might expect less fragmentation. If our rational powers are realized in a motley collection of disunited modules with no deep underlying unity, as some evolutionary psychologists have recently argued, then we may find greater fragmentation.<sup>16</sup>

Human reason is a self-narrating faculty. If we are to understand reason's true nature, we must understand the way in which it narrates its own history and dynamics. Reason's self-narration is, however, complicated by the fact that it is also a distributed faculty which occupies a plenum of distinct locations in configuration space both at any given time and over time. Hence if we are to understand the way in which reason narrates itself, we must explore the various ways in which dialectical cohorts represent one another. This will provide the essential clue to reason's distributed and ever-evolving self-understanding. We suppose that each native cohort has an internal, centered, and at least partial map of the rational landscape. To say that a cohort's map is centered is to say that it privileges its own location in configuration space as a sort of rational downtown.<sup>17</sup> By means of such a map, a cohort will locate other cohorts at varying rational distances from itself, considered as a center. Partiality reflects the possibility that not all locations in configuration space will necessarily be "accessible" from every other location in configuration space. When one cohort represents another

as “nearby” itself in configuration space, the members of the two cohorts will enjoy a high degree of rational solidarity, especially if the representation of rational proximity is mutual. Subjects who are in full rational solidarity participate in a community of reasons, grounded in a system of mutually conferred, mutually endorsed normative statuses.<sup>18</sup> There may still be disagreements even given full rational solidarity. But those disagreements will be mutually understood as reasonable disagreements to be reasonably settled by shared methods for settling such disagreements. Separated by a greater distance in rational space will be subjects who are represented as still reasoning but unreasonable. In the still reasoning but unreasonable other, subjects may recognize clear traces and signs of reason at work, but that recognition will not take place against a backdrop of fully shared normative fine structure. In the unreasonable but still reasoning other, we may recognize that there is still reasoning, still believing, still valuing, and still the conferral of normative status. But we may regard the reasoning as less than fully comprehensible, the values as alien, and the normative statuses as lacking in authority. Now, from our own decentered and detached perch of normative equanimity, relations among cohorts that take one another to be still reasoning but unreasonable is a matter of urgent theoretical interest. Such relations will play a significant role in our attempt to understand the extent to which reason, in its distributed multiplicity, is or is not divided from itself. Finally, at a greater rational distance still will be subjects who take the other to be not merely unreasonable but entirely “irrational.” When one takes another to be irrational, one may doubt that one firmly recognizes reason at work in the other at all. One does not necessarily locate the other entirely outside the landscape of reason—though one may be more likely to do so where a cohort is small, dialectically isolated, and manifestly incapable of more thoroughgoing engagement with other cohorts. It is in such cohorts that the remnants of reason may tend to reside.

Because we seek to chart both the internal contours and the outer boundaries of the distributed and ever-unfolding rational landscape from a normatively detached vantage point, we are not entitled to arbitrarily center our map on this or that point in configuration space. But since we also seek to understand reason’s distributed and diverse self-representation, we cannot ignore the role of self-centering in shaping the topology and dynamics of the landscape. Our own map of the rational landscape must therefore be a non-centered map of centered maps. We must chart not just the variety of locations in the rational landscape in their dynamic and topological relations one to another. We must also chart the vectors of the normative illuminations cast toward and from each location in configuration space. And this

raises a question of far-reaching significance for our inquiries. What are we to say when our non-centered map conflicts with one or more of the centered maps deployed by some native inhabitants? Suppose the members of a given dialectical cohort fail to represent as a possible configuration of reason what we, from our detached perspective, take to be just one more among reason's many local configurations. On what grounds do we disagree and declare that what the native inhabitants take to be unreason or the still reasoning but unreasonable other is but one further local configuration space, perhaps with equal claim to be a configuration of reason?

Our answer turns on a distinction between thick versus thin conceptions of reason. We construe reason in a maximally thin and, therefore, maximally encompassing way. Deploying a thin conception of reason positions us to be able to discern what is variable and what is fixed in the possible normative fine structures into which reason configures itself locally. On a thin conception of reason, we will find reason wherever we find agents with the power to confer normative status and the power to reflectively guide and govern their cognitive and conative lives, both collectively and individually, in accordance with such conferred statuses. Even where two dialectical cohorts differ significantly in their values, theories, epistemic practices, practical proclivities, political outlooks, or moral sensibilities, we are prepared to allow that though they may indeed occupy distinct locations in configuration space, they nonetheless count equally as configurations of reason. We do not presume to be able to say from the start which among the many different normative fine structures is more pleasing or more abhorrent to reason as such.

Native cohorts clearly are not subject to the same thinness constraint. Indeed, we have already implied that native cohorts will typically deploy thicker, less inclusive conceptions that privilege their own normative fine structures as rational centers. Though we do not purport to pronounce on what is more pleasing or abhorrent to reason as such, even from our detached perspective, we are free to take note that in centering their maps on their own locations in configuration space, native cohorts may mistakenly be representing that which is characteristic only of their own normative fine structure as fixed requirements of reason. They may also be mistakenly locating "alien" rational others at or beyond the outer boundaries of the landscape. By positioning ourselves to correct partisan-centered maps in this way, we do not rule out the very possibility that some apparently partisan-centered partial map or other may be revealed, over the course of our inquiries, as the one true and complete map of the landscape, correctly centered on its true downtown. Indeed, we may even allow that some dialectical cohort or other may already

deploy a thin, maximally encompassing, decentered map. But neither of these outcomes seems antecedently likely. Nothing could privilege an arbitrary point in configuration space as downtown in the rational landscape independently of its dynamical role in the landscape's overall temporal unfolding. To earn standing as the one true downtown, a normative fine structure would have to occupy a privileged dynamical role—perhaps as the single point of convergence toward which all configurations gradually evolve, though even this might not suffice. We might also expect it to have a privileged vector of illumination that correctly represents all remaining configurations in their true dynamic and topological relations to this one true downtown. It would be a surprising fact, in need of explanation, if the centered map of some arbitrary cohort turned out to have just such dynamical properties.

Now, the vector of illumination of a partisan map of any given dialectical cohort may itself evolve as the cohort gains increased understanding of the true dynamics and topology of the total rational landscape, including a better appreciation of their own dynamical location within it. Such evolution may perhaps be the long-run result of repeated encounters among cohorts with different normative fine structures. Through such encounters, cloistered cohorts, with constricted visions of the space of rational possibilities, may come to more fully appreciate that perhaps even those with starkly alien forms of life are still fully and equally rational. When the dogmatic religious zealot, armed with what she regards as rationally unassailable beliefs, confronts the skeptical secular humanist, who claims for her side the backing of reason to reject the dogmatist's most deeply held belief; or when the ardent defender of traditional values and mores, who sees these as a bulwark, erected by reason itself, as a defense against unreason, is brought short by the determined rejection of the transgressive other, who disdains rather than respects her hallowed traditions and rather sees in herself the leading edge of reason's future; or when the marauding cosmopolitan, traveling under the flag of a de-historicized, de-localized conception of the rational, finds herself the unwelcomed and despised stranger in localities stubbornly but happily mired in outmoded local ways, it is not entirely inconceivable that each will gain greater imaginative acquaintance with the realm of the rationally permissible. If so, such encounters may lead to increased, if begrudging, tolerance, perhaps even to an expansion of solidarity and more thoroughgoing rational community. Expanding solidarity might go hand in hand with the thinning out of thick conceptions of reason and the decentering of partisan maps. Given enough such encounters, perhaps there would be some degree of convergence over time in the parsing of normative fine structures into

elements that count as fixed requirements of reason and elements that may vary without loss of rationality.

Yet even a cursory perusal of human history tends to give the lie to such expectations. The thinning out of thick conceptions of reason and the decentering of partisan maps are far from being the inevitable outcomes of alien encounters. Especially when asymmetries of power are involved, such encounters often result not in greater tolerance or deepening solidarity, but in the brute domination of one over the other, perhaps even in the permanent silencing of one of reason's many voices. No doubt, the very thought that reason might be so divided against itself that in its free, unfettered operation it may configure itself into cohorts of dominator and dominated will seem bracing. One may seek refuge from this bracing thought in a kind of dismissal. One may reason that such configurations could be normatively grounded in nothing but the dominator's self-generated entitlement to power and privilege. But where the will of the dominated is not entirely extinguished, the self-generated entitlement of the dominator will be forever unrati ed and resisted by the dominated rational other. Not entirely without reason might one be tempted to dismiss such configurations as rare and unstable at the very least and entirely unjustifiable at the very most. But from our perch of detached equanimity, we are not entitled to the refuge of dismissal. It is not just that we cannot say in advance of observing the unfolding of the landscape whether configurations of reason involving a dominator and dominated are, in fact, either rare or unstable. It is also that we are not entitled to pronounce on which configurations are justified and which are not.

This last point bears further emphasis. For we may also be tempted to take refuge from the bracing thought not in dismissal but in denial. Such denial is facilitated by embracing the oft appealed to distinction between normative and motivating reasons.<sup>19</sup> Dominators may have their motivating reasons, it may be thought, but they will never have the weight of normative reasons on their side. But this refuge of denial is no more open to us than that of dismissal. Everywhere we look in the unfolding rational landscape, we observe competing reasons being proffered up by native inhabitants, one to another. These proffered-up reasons are always contestable and often contested. Both within and between native dialectical cohorts, we find proffered-up reasons which are rati ed by some and resisted by others. From our lofty perch, we have no part in settling such contests. Settling the contest of competing reasons is rather a messy retail business, properly belonging only to the native inhabitants of the landscape themselves. No doubt this always and everywhere unfolding retail dialectic of rati ed and

resistance plays an ineliminable role in shaping the rational landscape, the dynamics and topology of which we seek to chart. We must closely attend to the contest of reason. But we are in no position to declare victory for one side or the other in these contests. We have no a priori basis for supposing that any one of the diverse and distributed voices that emanate from that landscape speaks with the sort of trumping, singular normative authority that might be thought to issue in so-called normative reasons. The claim is not that none of the competing voices could possibly be endowed with singular authority or that there could not possibly be normative reasons. The point is only that any entitlement to singular normative authority or to the status as a distinctively normative reason can be made good only through the messy retail business of settling various contests of reason. Not just from outside, but even from within the landscape of reason there is no magisterial judge, singularly empowered to declare which reasons are victors in which contests of reason. Only the combatants themselves have standing to do so. But as long as each combatant is disposed to declare only for herself, and feels herself entitled to such a one-sided declaration, the contest of reasons will go forever on.

Let us close by taking brief stock. I have characterized reason as a distributed power, resident in a diverse array of localized voices, spread over a sprawling, variegated, ever unfolding landscape. I have suggested that only the landscape in its totality suffices to reveal the true intrinsic nature and destiny of reason. Though I have not begun to chart that landscape in its full complexity, I hope to have said enough to make it clear that once we have done so, we are likely to give the lie to the most cherished dreams of the rationalist. In its temporal unfolding, reason is unlikely to reveal itself as the one sure guide to the true and the good of the rationalist imagining—perhaps not even in the fullness of time. In its free and unfettered operation, reason will sometimes produce wide-ranging normative community. But it is also capable of producing much discord and division. Reason has no doubt enabled us to uncover some of nature's deepest secrets. But it may also become mired in error and illusion. I do not deny the majesty and power of the best that reason has bequeathed us. I insist only that the best achievements of reason are hard won and precarious, the uncertain results of messy, bottom-up, retail contests in which the victory of neither the true nor the good can be assured in advance.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Vancouver Workshop on the Intellect. I am grateful to the audience there for stimulating discussion and comments, especially to Owen Ware, who commented on an earlier draft. I am also grateful to

the members of my graduate seminar on Normativity, at Stanford University, for their engaged responses to this material. This essay develops themes touched on more briefly in Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant," and expanded upon at much greater length in Taylor, *Toward a Natural History of Normative Consciousness*.

## NOTES

1. In writing of a "broadly rationalist" concept of reason, I have in mind less a specific set of philosophical doctrines about the nature of reason than an overall outlook. That overall outlook sees reason as having certain intrinsic aspirations or pretensions—to know the world and to guide our conduct—and to have the power to, in some sense, guarantee its own success in those aspirations. So understood, those of a broadly rationalist disposition may disagree with one another on many fronts. They can disagree, for example, on the very question of whether the world known through the proper operation of reason is wholly independent of the mind or somehow a world of the mind's own making. The broad tendency I have in mind is clearly exemplified in early modern rationalists like Descartes, Leibniz, or Spinoza. But it is also exemplified in Kant and Hegel, neither of whom thought of themselves as a card-carrying rationalist of the early modern kind. I do not mean to downplay the differences among the variety of philosophers that I here lump into the broadly rationalist camp. But from the perspective of the current essay, their disputes have rather the character of family disputes—though a fractious family they no doubt are. Analytic philosophy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has focused hardly at all on the issues that have driven me away from a broadly rationalist conception of reason. It has focused hardly at all on the question with which I am seized in this essay—what should we say about the role of reason in driving the temporal unfolding of the sprawling human cultural landscape? Still, the rationalist tendency is plainly present within that style of philosophy. One finds manifestations of it in both early and late Frege (*Translations of the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege; The Foundations of Arithmetic*), in the two-dimensional semantics of Chalmers ("The Foundations of Two Dimensional Semantics"), in Davidson's (*Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*) *relentless wielding of the principle of charity to rule out both the possibility of global error and the possibility of incommensurable conceptual schemes*, in Peacocke's (*A Study of Concepts*) theory of concepts, in Scanlon's (*Being Realistic About Reasons*) Reason fundamentalism, in Wright's (*Truth and Objectivity; Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*) minimalism about truth and objectivity, to name just a few. It is also worth saying that one tends to find more explicit debates about the role of reason in shaping the total cultural landscape more prevalent among Continental than Analytic philosophers, perhaps due to the greater influence of Hegel on that tradition. Habermas (*The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society; The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. II: *Lifeworld and System*) and Foucault (*The Order of Things; History of Madness*) are two striking but opposed examples. For as long as there has been a rationalist tendency in philosophical thinking about the nature and destiny of reason, there has also been an anti-rationalist counter tendency. Moreover, just as with the rationalist tendency, the anti-rationalist counter tendency is a sprawling mansion, with many different rooms. Hume and the empiricists occupy an important room in that mansion. So too does Nietzsche, as do the American Pragmatists, in their own, more modest and measured way. My own thinking has been influenced both by manifestations of the broadly rationalist tendency and by manifestations of the anti-rationalist tendency. See, for example, Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant."
2. Dating back to at least Plato's *Theatetus*, many philosophers have held that genuine knowledge cannot be a matter of mere epistemic luck. And that has prompted them to ask how we can assure ourselves that our methods of belief fixation do more than just generate the occasionally lucky true belief and, instead, reliably generate genuine knowledge. A not unnatural thought is that we can do so by taking care that our beliefs are fully justified. Certainly, justified true beliefs

would seem to be the very opposite of epistemically lucky beliefs. Gettier ("Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?") is, however, widely credited with having given the decisive lie to that comforting thought by showing that even fully justified true beliefs could fail, by dint of mere luck, to count fully as knowledge. Ever since, the search has been on for something stronger than mere justification to shield us from the potentially undermining influence of mere epistemic luck. Thus have so-called anti-luck epistemologies come to abound. For a small sampling, see Dretske ("Conclusive Reasons"), Heller ("The Proper Role for Contextualism in an Anti-Luck Epistemology"), Pritchard (*Epistemic Luck*), Sosa (*A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Volume 1), Roush (*Tracking Truth: Knowledge, Evidence, and Science*). Anti-luck epistemologies come in many and diverse flavors. But the shared belief that there *MUST* and *CAN* be a safeguard against luck is, I think, a manifestation of what I am calling the rationalist tendency.

3. Since the pioneering work of Kahneman and Tversky—see Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (*Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*)—the catalog of named human cognitive biases has exploded. There are now something like two hundred named cognitive biases. One suspects that this number may be inflated by a perverse incentive structure that causes researchers to give each distinct manifestation of perhaps a small underlying set of biases a new name.
4. See Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant," for further elaboration of the significance of Martian philosophical anthropology.
5. See Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant," for further elaboration of the notion of a dialectical cohort.
6. Now, it must be stressed that even if dialectical partners do either explicitly or tacitly endorse a mode of reasoning as authoritative, the members of a cohort may lack explicit, conscious awareness of the ultimate nature, grounds, or limits of the relevant mode of reasoning. But that does not mean that there will not be some causal/historical explanation of how the relevant mode of reasoning came to be shared amongst the members of the relevant cohort or of how it functions to knit them together and sustain it as a dialectical cohort. Such a story may or may not be fully cognitively accessible from within the relevant cohort, but it may play a crucial role in our own anthropological-cartographical endeavors. For elaboration, see Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant," especially the discussion of competence.
7. I don't so much argue for internalism about reasons in this essay as take internalism as a point of departure. The *locus classicus* of internalism about practical reasons is, of course, Williams ("Internal and External Reasons"). For a recent and sophisticated defense of a kind of externalism about reason, see Scanlon (*Being Realistic About Reasons*). It is often alleged that an internalist about practical reason must endorse something like a Humean theory of motivation. Scanlon, for example, seems to make just this assumption. The theory of reasons gestured at here shares some of the spirit of a broadly Humean approach, but it envisions a motivational psychology that owes at least as much to Kant as to anything contemplated by Hume himself. See Taylor, "How to Hume a Hegel-Kant," for further elaboration. I also endorse internalism about justification and reasons for belief. But, again, I do not pretend to offer a conclusive argument for that position here. Rather, I take it as a point of departure in my attempt to chart the landscape of reason.
8. I need not deny that we sometimes seek, as it were, "external" validation to enhance the power of merely internal warrants. For example, we seek to verify our theories by appeal to evidence from the world below. But a proposition does not *function as evidence for us* merely by being true. If a proposition is to function as evidence for us, it must be *taken up* by us *as evidence*. Functioning as evidence is, on my view, a wholly internal matter. That is, a proposition does

not function as evidence merely by being true. Davidson (“A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”) once claimed that nothing can justify a belief except another belief. I think this is not quite right, since it leaves no role for mental states that are not yet themselves fully belief-like to play a role in the propagation of warrant. But though I hesitate to accept the strict letter of Davidson’s claim, I fully endorse its broad spirit. The deep point is that inward rush of the world upon the portals of sensation is a rush of mere energy. A rush of mere energy is not yet a rush of justifying reasons. It is only through the mediation of inner normative fine structures that the energetic deliverances of sensation are promoted into something that can play the warranting role characteristic of a reason. For a somewhat different take on Davidson’s supposed insight, see McDowell (*Mind and World*). It is also important to acknowledge that we sometime seek “external” ratification from the rational other for the norms that we proffer up to them. But though the rational other is external in one sense, she is still a center of subjectivity. When the other ratifies norms that we have proffered up, though *another* and in one sense external subjectivity has taken them up, we now stand in rational solidarity with the other and are thereby made into an “us” with the other. Though the warrant is in one sense no longer merely internal to this or that agent or collectivity of agents, it is still, in the relevant sense, a merely internal warrant.

9. See Taylor, “How to Hume a Hegel-Kant”; Taylor, “Selfhood as Self Representation”; and Taylor, *Toward a Natural History of Normative Consciousness*.
10. I focus on the mental attitude of valuing and its role in our rational mental lives rather than the state of having value. I take valuing to be both explanatorily and metaphysically prior to having value. Much contemporary ethical and metaethical discussions of value presume that things must be the other way around. Like Mackie (*Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*), I find this inversion of value and valuing metaphysically queer. To be sure, those who seek to execute this inversion typically claim otherwise we cannot avoid a collapse into a crude and implausible subjectivism. Among others, Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*; and Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, exemplifies this worry in spades. While I do endorse a kind of subjectivism about value and valuing in this essay, I hope it is evident that it can by no stretch of the imagination be called crude. For an admirable and wide-ranging recent defense of subjectivism that is honest about its cost and benefits, see Sobel, *From Valuing to Value: A Defense of Subjectivism*.
11. It is important to stress that valuing is not mere desiring. I can value that which I do not desire and desire that which I do not value. Valuing is bound up with my normative self-configuration in a way that mere desiring is not. See Taylor, “How to Hume a Hegel-Kant”; and Taylor, “Selfhood as Self Representation.”
12. For an interpretation of Kant along this line, see Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*, especially chapter 3, “Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant.”
13. Talk of “selfhood” is meant to forestall any temptation to reify the self. See Taylor, “Selfhood as Self Representation.” Selfhood is an overall property of a suitably organized organism or artifact, a property that an organism has in virtue of its capacity to deploy self-representations. Once we think of selfhood as an overall property of a suitably organized organism or artifact, we are positioned to reject both the Cartesian view of the self, according to which a self is a thinking, self-knowing, simple, possibly immaterial substance, known through but still prior to its own self-representations as eliminativism (à la Hume) or fictionalism (à la Dennett) that outright denies, or at least takes to be problematic and doubtful, the serious and robust existence of “the self.” There are no Cartesian thinking substances. But against the eliminativist cum fictionalist, there really and truly are beings organized as selves. We human animals are, for the most part, psychically organized in ways that exhibit selfhood.

14. The notion of an affordance is due to Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. The idea of a value affordance is not quite explicit in Gibson, though something like the idea seems to lurk just beneath the surface. Gibson is not entirely clear whether the “value” of a thing which affords various opportunities to a suitably constituted creature is in the thing independently of the creature or exists only relative to the creature. Something like the idea of an affordance is widely thought to be present in Husserl’s theory of perception. I take the correctness of this interpretation of Husserl’s approach on faith.
15. But see Taylor, *Toward a Natural History of Normative Consciousness*.
16. This is just what some evolutionary psychologists seem to believe about reason. See Cosmides and Toobey, “The Psychological Foundations of Culture.” See also Taylor, “What in Nature Is the Compulsion of Reason?”
17. That each cohort has a centered partisan map of the rational landscape relative to which it locates other cohorts in the rational landscape echoes, in a way, Davidson’s (“On the Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme”) rejection of the very idea of alternative conceptual schemes. It also echoes his oft repeated insistence that rationality can only be rationality by our own (partisan) lights. But where Davidson sees this as perhaps an unproblematic and essential feature of reason as such, I see it as a sign of the partisanship that often comes with merely local configurations of reason. It is, I think, an open question whether we could ever fully transcend mere partisanship in the mapping of the rational landscape. It is largely by way of giving ourselves a handle on how to approach this question that I distinguish in the text between thick and thin conceptions of reason.
18. For more on the notion of a normative status, see Taylor, “How to Hume a Hegel-Kant.”
19. The distinction between merely motivating and genuinely normative reasons has an ancient and distinguished pedigree. For a brief history, see Dancy, *Practical Reality*. Despite its distinguished pedigree, this distinction seems to me mostly to confuse rather than to clarify whenever it is invoked. But invoked it frequently is—reflexively and instinctively, with no hint of its problematic nature—in much contemporary literature. See, for example, Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Parfit, “Reasons and Motivation”; Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*; Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*; Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility*; among many, many others.

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