

Reason and Nature

MODERN thought undoubtedly suffers from the actual hostility between Nature and reason, which were once joined in the Hellenic ideal of science. The appeal for an effective and conscious union of these two fundamental elements of science is inspiringly illustrated in Prof. Cohen's work, which thus carries under its learned guise a constructive message to philosophers and men of science. Prof. Cohen believes neither in a conventional supernaturalism nor in a sentimental irrationalism, but he finds much inspiration in the older thinkers, and he is thus led to make this modest but useful, if not heroic, pronouncement: "The philosopher, whose primary interest is to attain as much truth as possible, must put aside as a snare the effort of originality. Indeed, it seems to me that the modern penchant for novelty in philosophy is symptomatic of restlessness or low intellectual vitality." It is in this spirit of a true friend of wisdom that he surveys the general meaning of the principles of procedure according to which scientific results are obtained and according to which these results are being constantly revised.

Reason and Nature is a collection of essays, either recently published elsewhere or brand new, concerning both epistemic and practical rationality. The essays span the fields of epistemology, meta-ethics, evolutionary psychology, and cognitive science. One of the stated goals of the volume is to bring together a variety of perspectives and approaches to rationality. In keeping with this goal, the volume is loosely organized into two sections. The papers appearing in the first group focus on more purely philosophical approaches to rationality and in particular the status of norms of rationality and the shape these norms take. In contrast, the articles in the second group tend to take an evolutionary psychological or cognitive scientific perspective on the question of what place rationality has in psychological and causal explanations. This division is a bit misleading insofar as some papers in the second group, e.g., Levi's, concern far more than whether or not rationality is a useful explanatory concept, but it does help to provide some limited structure. Another general theme, although one taken up only sporadically by the entries in the collection, is whether rationality can be naturalized. A little fewer than half of the papers are critical evaluations of other papers in the volume, and so there is often a proposal-then-response feel to the volume. This is not unwelcome, though, since the essays are uniformly quite interesting. Since the papers as a whole do not share any single theme, in this review I will briefly outline most of the papers and provide some critical remarks.

The first substantive entries are an exchange between Paul Boghossian ("How are Objective Epistemic Reasons Possible") and Crispin Wright ("On Basic Logical Knowledge") about the treat of epistemic relativism and the justification of objective norms of epistemic rationality. Boghossian argues that there is a real problem about the justification of objective, universally binding norms of rationality. The justification of a norm, thinks Boghossian, comes about through the justification of a belief that the norm is objective. The problem is to explain how such a belief could be justified, and justified in a way that means the agent is epistemically responsible when employing the rule. Appeals to pure intuition

are unhelpful and mysterious and so do not make clear how a belief in the objectivity of a norm is justified. There is as of yet no good account of why such beliefs might be default-reasonable, and attempts at an inferential justification of the belief inevitably become rule-circular (e.g., need to rely on the rule in question in order to justify the belief about the goodness of the rule), at least when fundamental logical rules like *modus ponens* are concerned (20-28). Since none of these options seem particularly appealing, epistemic relativism or noncognitivism (non-factualism) are serious possibilities (28-34).

Reason and Nature is a very nice collection of papers which succeeds in bringing together a variety of perspectives about reasoning. All of them are well written and worth study, and Bermúdez and Millar select very appropriate papers. Because the entries cover a host of different topics, not all of the papers are likely to be of interest to a single reader. Still, it is a volume well worth reading by those interested in philosophical or cognitive scientific approaches to reasoning.