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### **Brute Rationality**

Normativity and Human Action

This book presents a new account of normative practical reasons and the way in which they contribute to the rationality of action. Rather than simply 'counting in favor of' actions, normative reasons play two logically distinct roles: requiring action and justifying action. The distinction between these two roles explains why some reasons do not seem relevant to the rational status of an action unless the agent cares about them, while other reasons retain all their force regardless of the agent's attitude. It also explains why the class of rationally permissible action is wide enough to contain not only all morally required action, but also much selfish and immoral action. The book will appeal to a range of readers interested in practical reason in particular, and moral theory more generally.

Joshua Gert is Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Florida State University. He has published in a number of philosophical journals including *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Ethics*, and *Noûs*.

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To my parents, my sister Heather,  
and my wife Victoria

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## *Preface and acknowledgements*

I would guess that the first time I read any real philosophy was when I was about ten years old. Sitting and reading aloud on the living room couch with my father, I took the part of Hylas in Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*. It is a happy memory for me, despite the fact that I turned out, as those familiar with that dialogue will know, not to have very many lines, and always to be wrong. I also have a very distinct visual memory, from roughly the same period, of the moment my father presented the open question argument to me. He didn't explain the problems with the argument, and if he had, I doubt I would have understood what he was saying. I was just sophisticated enough that the argument seemed to me to show exactly what Moore thought it showed. I didn't like having to believe in non-natural properties. I didn't even have any clear idea what they were. But I had to do it. Twenty-seven years later, I think I might have gotten out of the problem.

Those two memories may be the oldest ones I have of doing any philosophy with my father, but they are by no means the only ones. Later memories are less distinct, probably because philosophical discussion became as common as eating dinner. But as far as I can recall, all of these memories of talking philosophy with my father – of arguing and criticizing, and, generally, of being shown that I didn't know what I was talking about – are uniformly happy. My love for philosophy is, I am sure, continuous with my great love for my father. There is no doubt that it is my father who has had the most profound philosophical impact on me. Indeed, I am pleased to think of myself, in many parts of this book, as refining, building upon, and modifying his views, just as other philosophers have refined, built upon, and modified the views of their advisors. Given that my father's influence began early, I cannot adequately express how lucky I feel that so many of his starting points have turned out to be so fruitful. For it is hard to deny that the students of Kantians tend to become Kantians, and the students of Humeans tend to become Humeans. When I consider

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the strength of this law of philosophical inheritance, and realize how easily I might have fallen under the spell of a mainstream view (or, worse, a currently fashionable one), I am reminded of the huge role fortune plays in all the achievements for which we would like to take exclusive credit.

Other than my father, I would like to thank a number of people with whom I have had profitable conversations or correspondence on the topics I address in the following chapters. I should single out Daniel Callcut, Charles Chastain, and John Deigh, both for the sheer volume of conversation, and also for entering into the discussion with sufficient sympathy to understand the whole picture. Thanks also to Peter Achinstein, Ken Akiba, Robert Audi, John Broome, María Victoria Costa, Jonathan Dancy, Heather Gert, Peter Hylton, Anthony Laden, Paul McNamara, Al Mele, Andrew Melnyk, Karen Neander, Brian Neuslein, Joseph Raz, Thomas Scanlon, Jerome Schneewind, Paul Weirich, and Susan Wolf.

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Chapter 1 takes the form it does largely because I was invited to give an overview of my account of reasons and rationality at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata in La Plata, Argentina, in the summer of 2002. I am very grateful to Pedro Karczmarczyk and Martín Daguerre for organizing that talk, and I am grateful to all the members of that audience for their patience with my Spanish. The material for chapter 2 was previously published as "Practical Rationality, Morality, and Purely Justificatory Reasons" in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (3), 227–43. I am grateful to the Executive Editor of *APQ*, Nicholas Rescher, for permission to use that material here. Most of the material for chapters 3 and 7 was previously published in the *Southern Journal of Philosophy* as "Skepticism about Practical Reasons Internalism" 39 (1), 59–77 and "Two Concepts of Rationality" 41 (3), 367–98, and some material for chapter 3 was also taken from "Korsgaard's Private-Reasons Argument" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (2), 303–24. I thank the Editor of the *Southern Journal*, Nancy Simco, and the editors of *PPR* for permission to use that material here. Chapter 4 appears as "A Functional Role Analysis of Reasons" in



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Finally, I should thank Florida State University for summer funding provided through their FYAP Summer Grant program. It was during the summer in which I received this funding that I was able to revise the manuscript to deal – I cannot say how successfully – with the comments of Russ Shafer-Landau and Michael Ridge, who reviewed the original manuscript for Cambridge University Press. My final thanks go to them for their sympathetic and open-minded attitude, and for many useful criticisms.