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Reputation in Moral Philosophy

Gloria Origgi

Abstract

This chapter analyzes the philosophical import of the notion of reputation along two main axes: (1) reputation as a motivation for action, and (2) reputation as a special kind of social information. Is reputation a rational motive of action? Can it be an ultimate aim or is it always reducible to some kind of self-interest? Is reputation a rational means to extract information from the social world? Should we rely on other’s evaluations? By reconstructing the philosophy of reputation in the history of thought and analyzing the contemporary approaches to reputation in philosophy, the chapter also provides also some rudiments of an “epistemology of reputation.”

Keywords

reputation, honor, esteem, self-interest, social epistemology

1. Introduction

We monitor the informational environment and catch reputational cues, gather signals from our informants, and develop our trustful attitudes in context. We monitor also our own behavior to send signals that contribute to build our reputation in the eyes of other people. Reputation is a way of acquiring knowledge and a way of managing our image. This central feature of our cognitive and social life is emerging in informationally dense, hyperconnected societies as a fundamental social commodity that orientates our social interactions and our epistemic practices, such as evaluating information or choosing a doctor. Yet the very nature of this commodity needs to be defined more precisely. Although reputation is a concept already in use in many branches of social science, as

this Handbook shows, it still lacks a sound philosophical definition and an appropriate conceptual analysis. What is “reputation”? Is it a social value that motivates our action, a measurable quantity that indicates the value of other people and things, a collective cognitive state, a cloud of opinions that influences how social information circulates? Reputation seems shrouded in a mystery: the reasons it waxes or wanes and the criteria that define it as good or bad often appear fortuitous and arbitrary. Yet reputation is also ubiquitous. On the one hand, we care intensely about the opinion of others, sometimes to the point of committing irrational acts in a bootless effort to determine how others see us. On the other hand, we rely on reputation to guide our choice of doctors, newspapers, websites, and even ideas. It seems to insinuate itself into the most intimate recesses of our existence. Yet reputation has been inexplicably neglected by philosophy: no entries until recently in philosophical dictionaries, no scholarly monographs devoted to the concept. Apart from some rare mentions of the concept in the literature on classical moralists, contemporary philosophy seems to dismiss the notion as a vestige of pre-modern and anti-individualist societies where fame, honor, and the effort to win and maintain prestige in a social hierarchy played a pivotal role that modernity has allegedly demolished. Reputation nevertheless remains critically important to the many challenges of contemporary society. The way in which it is created, managed, earned, and lost; the biases that influence our ways of reading reputations, its reliability, and influence will the subject of this chapter on the philosophical foundations of reputation.

In this chapter, I tackle reputation both as a sociocognitive and a motivational attitude. Reputation is a special kind of social information: it is social information about the value of people, systems, and processes that release information. Reputation is also the informational trace of our actions: it is the credibility that an agent or an item earns through repeated interactions. This social track of ourselves is a constant feedback of the social effects of our actions that motivates us in acting in certain ways. If interactions are repeated, reputation may conventionalize in “seals of approval” or disapproval or social stigmas.

Reputation is thus an epistemological resource to navigate the social world by extracting social information from other people's behavior and gossip (who says what to whom) and also a motivational resource for individual and collective behavior: if I am aware that my actions leave a reputational track that can be read by others and influences my credibility, I will be motivated in developing strategies of management of my "image" in order to control my reputation in the eyes of others.

This chapter aims at (1) providing a conceptual analysis of the notion that can unify its different uses in different areas of social science; (2) connecting the philosophical tradition on "symbolic motivations" (honor, fame, sympathy) to the contemporary reflection on reputation; (3) critically assessing other theories of "symbolic motivation." such the quest of esteem and honor, in contemporary moral philosophy; and (4) presenting some rudiments of an *epistemology of reputation*, that is, the possible uses of reputation to extract information from the social world.

My philosophical inquiry on what is reputation can be framed by these two main questions: (1) Is reputation a rational motivation for action? (2) Is reputation a *rational* justification for coming to believe new information? My answer to both questions is positive: reputation *can* be a rational motivation for action and a rational justification of belief, if we come to understand the social dimension of our actions and beliefs as essentially constitutive of our moral and epistemic life.

But let me start with a brief review of the concept in the history of philosophy.

2. Reputation in the History of Philosophy

The few reflections in the history of philosophy about reputation are to be found in the domain of *moral philosophy*. Between the 15th and the 17th century in Europe, a rich tradition of *moralist writings* develops, especially in Italy and France. These writings explore the human passions and vices, give up to the idea of constructing an ideal image of the human being, and favor a realistic portrait of our deepest motivations. *The Prince* of Machiavelli, published in 1532, is one of the first texts in which *reputation* is considered as an instrument of power for the prince: he must care about

his reputation and conceive his strategies to earn a good reputation even through mean actions. Machiavelli insists on the importance of concentrating the evil in just one action (for example, a big massacre of opponents to the regime) while slowly distributing good actions, because what is important is what people will remember, and they will forget a single bad action quickly and will attach a positive reputation to the government who continues to distribute good things.

Many other authors, among whom Montagne, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, wrote about one of the most dangerous of the human passions: *l'amour-propre* (vanity), that is, when esteem depends on the opinion of others, a concept that is very close to that of reputation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau contrasts *amour-propre,* that is, a form of love for oneself that depends on others, and *amour-de-soi* (self-love), a more primitive and natural form of love for oneself that our survival and happiness depend on. In his *Discourse upon the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality among Mankind,* Rousseau explains the origins of inequality among men as in the emergence of a distinction between what men are and how they are perceived by others and in the need to be esteemed:

> Men no sooner began to set a value upon each other, and know *what esteem was,* than each laid claim to it, and it was no longer safe for any man to refuse it to another. Hence the first duties of civility and politeness, even among savages; and hence every voluntary injury became an affront, as besides the mischief, which resulted from it as an injury [. . . .] It was requisite for men to be *thought what they really were not*. To be and to appear became two very different things, and from this distinction sprang pomp and knavery, and all the vices which form their train. (Rousseau, 1754)

Thus, according to Rousseau (even if he doesn't use the word), the quest for esteem and the distinction between our self and our social existence are the two aspects that make reputation a crucial ingredient to grow a society, even if he sees them as vicious passions that corrupt the good nature of human being.

In his *Elements of Law and Natural Politics,* Thomas Hobbes defines “honor” as a fundamental *comparative passion*, that is, something that has value only insofar it is acknowledged by others:

> The signs of honour are those by which we perceive that one man acknowledges the power and worth of another. Such as these: To praise; to magnify; to bless, or call happy; to pray or supplicate to; to thank; to offer unto or present; to obey; to hearken to with attention; to speak to with consideration; to approach unto in decent manner, to keep distance from; to give the way to, and the like; which are the honour the inferior gives to the superior. (Hobbes, 1640)

The fundamental feature of reputation, that is, being the part of ourselves that depends on the judgments of the others, and its role in the maintenance of social relations was thus already acknowledged by these classical authors.

But it is Adam Smith, moral philosopher and founder of modern economics, who first recognizes the central role of reputation in coordinating social interactions. In Adam Smith’s liberal social theory, reputation is considered as a way of coordinating activities in a decentralized social space of transactions. According to Smith, in a free society, markets coordinate diffused knowledge in an asymmetrical way: people have a partial view of what other people know and how they will act. Also, given that most transactions occur over a lapse of time, parties have to trust each other that they will satisfy their reciprocal interest. These informational and temporal asymmetries call for efficient means of storing and retrieving information about possible partners in interactions. Reputation is more than pure information: it is evaluated information——a shortcut of the many judgements and interpretations that people have cumulated about an actor. That is why people are interested in keeping a “good” reputation by signaling to potential business partners their trustworthiness. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith famously states:

> The success of most people almost always depends upon the favor and the good opinion of their neighbors and equals; and without a tolerably regular conduct these

> can very seldom be obtained. The good old proverb, therefore, that honesty is the best policy, holds, in such situations, almost perfectly true. (Smith, 1759)

For Smith, a good reputation pays in the marketplace. If you are a reliable player, your business will thrive because your potential clients will form positive expectations about your actions in the future based on your records. Reputation is thus, in this tradition, a cognitive notion: it is the expectation about your future actions that agents form, given your past behavior. Your past records are a signal of your future intentions, a signal on which people can rely if they decide to interact with you. Yet Although Smith endorses a vision of reputation as advantageous cooperation, in other passages of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he puts forward another view of reputation, one based on the human passion for sympathy and more related to the Hobbesian concept of honor or Rousseau's idea of self-love as a basic need for recognition:

> Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren. She taught him to feel pleasure in their favorable and pain in their unfavorable regard. She rendered their approbation most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake; and their disapprobation most mortifying and most offensive. (Smith, 1759)

And again: "It is the vanity, not the ease or the pleasure, that interests us." In this second sense, Adam Smith puts reputation into the family of social passions, such as honor, glory, esteem, and recognition, as in the classical moral tradition we have seen earlier.

The development of contemporary social sciences such as economic, social, and behavioral sciences made Smith's first interpretation of reputation—that is, the idea that *reputation pays*—triumph. Reputation is thus treated in the contemporary literature in game theory, market theory, and rational choice theory as a form of indirect *interest* instead of a social passion. We care about our reputation because we have an interest in doing this. The moralist tradition has been basically forgotten as a vestige of pre-modern philosophy where passions had not been already submitted to interest (Hirschman, 1977). Until recently, reputation has been considered mainly within the

paradigm of strategic rationality, as an interested strategy to cumulate social and economic advantages. We will come back in the next section to some recent treatments of reputation in moral philosophy that consider it as an ultimate aim, in line with the classical moralists, not reducible to any strategic quest for gains.

3. Reputation as a Motivation for Action

This section explores a different paradigm than that of strategic rationality that can account for our care of reputation without reducing it to a form of indirect interest. But let me first introduce briefly the mainstream paradigm that considers reputation as interest.

3.1 Altruism and Reputation

One of the conundrums of the theories of human action based on rational self-interest is that of explaining altruistic actions (Wittek, Snijders, & Nee 2013). Why should selfish individuals invest time and energy to helping others, even people they won't interact with again? Is altruism rationally possible?

In his celebrated 1971 article, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," the sociobiologist Robert Trivers showed that natural selection can explain altruism in a way compatible with the selfish rationality of agents. An altruistic gesture, such as saving someone from drowning, allows the agent to accumulate a positive *reputation* and thereby creates in the beneficiary of the altruistic act a moral-emotional pressure to reciprocate in the future. In other words, altruists expose themselves to momentary risks contrary to their short-term interests because they are anticipating future gains. The pervasiveness of this hope to obtain future benefits from acts of seemingly self-denying generosity has been amply confirmed by experimental economics, which conducts laboratory studies on the behavior of agents asked to follow simple rules of interaction and transaction. In the *dictator game*, for instance, one experimental subject receives a sum of money

that he can divide however he wishes with a second participant (see Engel, 2011 for a meta-review of the literature on Dictator Game; see also Milinski, this volume). The two subjects do not know each other. Yet the dictator, that is, the individual who can unilaterally decide how to distribute the money, seldom acts in a wholly self-interested way. On average, he or she gives at least 20 percent of the original sum to the other participant. This shows, according to the conductors of such experiments, that human beings expect to be able to draw some benefit from behaving at least "somewhat" generously (Henrich, Boyd, et al., 2004). The principal benefit they anticipate receiving is *a good reputation*. This approach thus reduces reputation to a sort of *indirect interest*: it is the strategic anticipation of the benefits related to having a good reputation that motivates the agent. What I would like to explore here is a different approach: Is it ever possible to be motivated *only* by reputation as an ultimate end and not as a mean to get an interested result? When people care, for example, for their reputation after their death, and act in order to maximize their reputation afterlife (such as by making donations), are they to be considered as acting in a sort of indirectly interested way or can we try to explain their acts by appealing to their care of reputation? Let us see if it possible to frame a theory of reputation as an ultimate end instead of one of means.

In what sense can our care for reputation be an ultimate motivation for action? To answer this question, we need a theory of action that treats reputation as an independent variable; in other words, as a factor that, when varied, causes subsequent actions to vary accordingly. Examples include moral theories arguing that individuals act morally not from a love of justice but with an eye to how others will judge them. Among economic theories, the most relevant are those that interpret reputation as a scarce resource and that see demand for this scarce resource as a constraint on behavior.

From a philosophical perspective, we need a slightly different ontology of the agents and their motivations. For this purpose, let me introduce some elements of an ontology of *homo comparativus*, the human animal whose decisions and actions hinge on relations with others and whose choices and actions are driven by a crying need for recognition and approval by others.

Not only are human beings competitive and cooperative (Baumard, André, & Sperber 2013), but they are also "comparative," that is to say, born and bred to draw comparisons and contrasts between themselves and others. Their actions and achievements mean nothing unless and until they are compared with the achievements and actions of others and are assessed according to some generally applicable scale of values. Value—be it moral, economic, or epistemic—is created through contextually specified differentiations. It exists by virtue of a normative contrast made manifest through comparison. Value is not inherent in things or persons themselves. Rather, like images reflected ad infinitum in two facing mirrors, value is wholly relational. It originates in the relationship between things or persons. It is the autonomous product of comparative exchange; and it has no other purpose or significance. We create value to create value. Value cannot be reduced to other pre-existent factors, such as utility, scarcity, or labor as understood in economics. It is the cognitive footprint and the matrix of opinions that all human interaction engenders and that structures the perceptions we have of ourselves and others. We can grasp reality only on the basis of a scale of values that presupposes a hierarchically organized world. But this unavoidable perspective on the world is not solely sociocultural. It is also rooted in our physiology of perception. Our perceptual faculties are structured to detect variations in the environment (Kahneman & Tversky, 1981). The way our organs of perception process information depends on discrepancies between qualities or attributes within any given context. Our perceptual apparatus is designed to register differences, focusing on variations, disparities, and incongruities to identify the salient characteristics of what we perceive. This essentially comparative nature can be found at all levels of our psychology: perceptual, cognitive, and social (Festinger, 1954; Suls & Wheeler, 2013; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

A hard-wired *comparative consciousness* is one of the most distinctive characteristics of human nature. It influences our perception of the world, our cognition, our emotions, and our decisions. We read the world through an evaluative prism. Our very sense of *objectivity* presupposes a hierarchy of values. This does not mean that the world around us does not exist or that it is

completely relative to our point of view. Evaluative distinctions are inscribed in the relational dimension of our world, in the plethora of social networks that knit together our reality and that permit us to extract information from the world. These networks are constitutive of the world. In that sense, there is no humanly accessible ultimate reality lying beyond or behind the experienced interconnection of events. It is thanks to these relations that we perceive the world and that information acquires salience, meaning, and value. It is on this essential comparative dimension of our judgment that contemporary theories of reputation as a motivation for action are based.

3.2 Reputation and Esteem

In developing the rudiments of an *economy of esteem* (or *kudonomia,* from the Greek for "glory" or "acclaim"), the philosopher Philip Pettit and the economist Geoffrey Brennan have identified two sides of esteem: the *comparative* and the *directive* (Brennan & Pettit, 2004). Esteem is comparative because, most of the time, the intensity of esteem depends not on an absolute ranking but on a ranking relative to others: "x does better than y along this dimension." But esteem is also "directive" because expressing esteem for others encourages them, in numerous situations, to behave in a way that will earn our further esteem. The evaluative nature of esteem is therefore double. On the one hand, esteem is evaluative because it implies a ranking of better and worse. On the other hand, it is normative because it involves a value-judgment, distinguishing actions that merit esteem from those that merit contempt or disapproval and thereby implicitly encouraging action that will predictably earn esteem rather than scorn. The quest for esteem can thus for them be an essential motivation, not a further reducible form of interest. Although Brennan and Pettit apply standard micro-economic theory to model the implications of this assumption, arguing for example, that individuals will engage in actions that improve their reputation and avoid those that reduce it, they do not reduce the quest for esteem to any form of indirect interest. People look for esteem because they like to be esteemed by others, not because their interests will be best served if they have a good reputation.

Although this approach is one of the few that considers the quest for esteem and reputation as an ultimate aim that motivates action, their theory doesn't consider an important dimension of reputation; that is, its *communicative* dimension. Our reputations are clouds of social representations of ourselves that circulate through gossip and the various forms of "formal" and "informal" communication. In Pettit and Brennan's model, esteem is a *linear* quantity; that is, the esteem we receive is directly proportional to the estimability of our act. Yet reputation and esteem are essentially *nonlinear.* We launch a signal of our good intentions to earn esteem by others but we are never sure of the result: the signal doesn't reach the target linearly, it breaks out into many bits of information that circulate because they depend on communication: they are propagated by networks and depend on the differing levels of prestige of the authorities who accord their esteem. Standard linear situations, in fact, where the action of the agent is taken at its face value, and thus the agent can expect to be estimated as he would like to be just from behaving in a way that carries esteem from his social environment, are the exception rather than the rule. The mechanisms through which esteem circulates in a society are more complex. Also, we never accord esteem autonomously, without regard to the way others may morally praise or condemn any particular decision to grant esteem. Indeed, most of my allocations of esteem echo authorities whom I believe to be "competent" at evaluating the esteem-worthiness of an action or person.

Thus, Brennan and Pettit's theory, although is one of the most advanced attempts in contemporary philosophy to provide a theory of reputation as a motivation for action, doesn't fully capture the complexities of the phenomenon. We are motivated by reputation and esteem because we defer to the authority and the prestige of other people in conforming to a certain behavioral norm. Our quest for reputation is thus indissociable to the prestige we attribute to our judges.

3.3 Reputation and Honor

We care about our reputation and invest time and energy to defend our "honor," that is, the image of ourselves that we think other people owe us to respect. As we have seen, honor is a possible

candidate for a theory of moral action that takes into account our reputational concerns. Although honor is usually considered as a pre-modern motivation for action, typical of the values of chivalry and heroism of the aristocratic world, a number of philosophers claim today that honor can still be a motivation in a contemporary, disenchanted world.

In moral philosophy, Stephen Darwall and Antony Appiah (Appiah, 2010, Darwall 2013) have "rehabilitated" honor in contemporary moral theories, again, by considering it as an ultimate motivation that is not reducible to interested strategies.

Although honor is often dismissed as a premodern norm, Appiah argues that it remains an important motivation for moral action. To make his case, he focuses on three historical episodes of moral revolution: the discontinuation of dueling in Great Britain, the abandonment of foot-binding in China, and the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In all three cases, traditional moral practices were upended in a remarkably short span of time even though the rupture was neither enforced by explicit new legal prohibitions nor accompanied by a genuine shift in moral sentiments. Although every one of these practices had been criticized earlier on moral grounds, they nevertheless had survived in social habits and personal conduct. At a certain moment, however, they suddenly and completely collapsed. What these three examples of moral revolution have in common, according to Appiah, is that each was motivated by *honor*. Moral revolutions occur, according to Appiah, when an implicit honor code emerges with the following dual purpose: to give honor or respect to the victims of the moral practice being overturned and to gain honor or respectability for those who boldly acknowledge the (previously besmirched) honor of these victims. As he says: "So, honor is no decaying vestige of a premodern order; it is, for us, what it has always been, an engine, fueled by the dialogue between our self-conceptions and the regard of others, that can drive us to take seriously our responsibilities in a world we share"(Appiah 2010).

Yet our need to have our esteem for others reciprocated is not only a desire to be loved and recognized by others. It is also a strategy of social cognition. It represents a search for external feedback to strengthen our confidence in our evaluative choices. If those I esteem also esteem me—

at least to some extent—then I am presumably on the right track when making value judgments about the social world around me. Admittedly, this self-reinforcing exchange of esteem for esteem can lead to vicious circles. Like La Fontaine's fox who convinces himself that the plump red grapes before his eyes are not yet ripe simply because he cannot reach them, we sometimes withhold or withdraw our esteem from those who fail to reciprocate. With all due respect to Groucho Marx, who didn't care to join any club that would have him as a member, we routinely seek to integrate ourselves into social groups that we admire and that, at the same time, treat us respectfully. As for Pettit and Brennan's analysis of esteem, Appiah's notion of honor as a motivation doesn't consider a fundamental component of this symbolic resource: its circulation. We want to be honored by those whom we honor in a circle of mutual recognition that allows social norms to stabilize and thrive.

These recent approaches based on "symbolic commodities" such as esteem and honor go toward the direction of a theory of reputation as a rational motivation for action. Yet the struggle for prestige and recognition is therefore always two-sided. When we act in a way that displays our esteem for others we are establishing social hierarchies; but, in doing so, we are also changing our own social position. Can reputation, esteem, and honor function as motivations for actions? The answer is "Yes," to the extent that granting and being granted a reputation are two faces of the same dynamic. It is the process by which we all seek and find our relative place in the shifting social worlds we inhabit.

4. Reputation as a Rational Justification for Belief

Let us turn now to the second main question of this chapter, that is, if reputation can be a rational mean to extract information from the environment. Although this may seem highly counterintuitive for philosophers who think that *cognitive autonomy* is one of the key features of knowledge, that is, you know only those facts which you have either directly experienced or you have inferred from other experiences in a rational way, the cognitive overload of information in which we all live now

requires an extension of our traditional epistemological means, thus including reputation as social information about the judgements of others as a rational means of acquiring knowledge.

Quality uncertainty and informational asymmetries have become crucial epistemological issues in contemporary information-dense societies. The vast amount of information available on the Internet and in the media makes the problem of reliability and credibility of information a central issue in the management of knowledge. Items that do not come with some label, or seal of approval from the appropriate communities, are lost in the data deluge of the information age.

From the evaluator's perspective—the agent who has to filter information—reputation has thus an informational value. Reputation is a relation between an agent or an item and the set of social and cultural representations of the agent or the item. It may be useful here to distinguish between *cultural representations* and social representations. A cultural representation is a cognitive artefact that is typically stored in a community. It represents the *shared knowledge* of that community. In this sense it is a "metarepresentational" phenomenon; that is, a representation of a representation that is socially distributed. Each one in that particular community is supposed to share a certain number of representations that are considered *common knowledge* (Sperber 1996; 2000). Thus, I judge your reputation through a social representation that is not only generated by our ongoing interaction, but also by cultural representations that have previously been attached to you, that have circulated about you, and that are held by people I trust or to whom I defer. Having a reputation is thus being attached to an evaluative representation of ourselves that is socially and culturally generated and stabilized (Sperber et al. 2010). A reputation is the shortcut of the many strategies, heuristics, and evaluations that have positioned a person or an item in a certain hierarchical configuration. As we have seen, reputation is not only a cognitive notion, but also a social and cultural notion that has to do with the way in which the social environment is organized: it spreads through networks, cumulates through ratings, and manifests various effects that are independent of our cognition.

Reputation serves the cognitive purpose of making us navigate among things and people whose value is opaque for us because we do not know enough about them. We use seals, scales, grades, indexes, and classifications not only to evaluate them, but also to create valuable categories that allow us to classify reality. The very act of classifying entities orders them according to the reputational rankings that sometimes are already available in our culture and sometimes are ad hoc artefacts that organize a space of discrimination. Let us start with the timeline of "classification" and "evaluation." When we think about categorization, we commonly view taxonomies as cognitive tools that describe objective relations and properties between classes and objects. Taxonomies, then, provide an ontological structure for a domain. Evaluative tools come afterward to impose a ranking on these items. Contrasting this classical picture of knowledge organization, I would like to argue that reputation is prior to classification. In many epistemic practices, we use rating systems to categorize and classify items. Our capacity of organizing our thoughts about how the world is structured and conceiving appropriate institution would be much more limited without the contribution of the preferences already aggregated in the past by others. In this sense, cultural representations help reduce cognitive complexity. Another important aspect of reputational and rating systems is that they combine two types of information for the sake of knowledge organization and evaluation: (1) information about the *fact* of the matter (for example, perceptual information about the taste of wine, factual information about the wine region), and (2) *social* information about people and past interactions; that is, what people have said about a particular product and how the cultural representations of that product are conveyed in a series of labels, signs, and received discourses (as, for example, the cultural representations of a particular wine that we may infer from its label on the bottle). One of the examples I have analyzed elsewhere of the interplay between reputation and classification is the system of *classification of wines* (Origgi, 2007).

The presence of these "reputational devices," that is the complex sociocultural mechanisms that organize social information, is a necessary condition for any acquisition of information: the unbiased interaction with the external world, an image so dear to the traditional epistemology, is an

unrealistic limit-case of a subject in contact with a reality not filtered by others. Without the presence of filters, of already existing evaluations that shape a corpus of knowledge, we would face the impossible task of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the two heroes of Flaubert who decided to retire and to go through every known discipline without, in the end, being able to learn anything.

Preferences, conventions, and values that others have expressed thus play a central epistemic role in the making of knowledge: they shape the reputational landscape that we use to organize our own heuristics to extract information and provide a sometimes reliable and sometimes too biased shortcut to what is worth keeping, remembering, and preserving as knowledge. The epistemological enquiry I am advocating here implies that reputation and rating systems are an *essential ingredient* of knowledge. Reputation *is* a rational criterion of information extraction, a fundamental shortcut for cumulating knowledge in processes of collective wisdom, and an ineludible filter to access facts. In an environment where sources are in constant competition to get attention and the option of the direct verification of the information is simply not available at reasonable costs, evaluation and rankings are epistemic tools and cognitive practices that provide an inevitable shortcut to information. This is especially striking in contemporary, informationally overloaded societies, but I think it is a permanent feature of any extraction of information from a corpus of knowledge. There is no ideal knowledge that we can adjudicate without the access to previous evaluations and adjudications of others. No Robinson Crusoe's minds that investigate and manipulate the world in a perfect solitude. The higher the uncertainty is on the content of information, the stronger the weight of the opinions of others is to establish the quality of this content.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter on the philosophical foundations of reputation, I have advanced a definition of the concept of "reputation" suitable for philosophical purposes, that is, as *social information* that spreads from our actions to a myriad of representations that circulate about us. I have argued for this definition by trying to answer to two main questions that a philosophy of reputation puts

forward: (1) Is reputation a rational motivation for action? (2) Is reputation a rational justification for belief? I positively answer both questions, thus putting reputation at the core of a plausible theory of our actions and beliefs.

Although the systematic study of reputation in philosophy is at its beginnings, a relevant literature already exists that I have reviewed here about its role as a rational motivation for action and its epistemological role as an information filter. Further research in philosophy and social science could benefit from a clearer perspective on what it means to "count" or have significance in the minds of others. The cognitive order in which the world is given is not separable from its social order; that is, from the judgment of others and the way they influence our perception of ourselves and of the world.

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