Norms and Reasons

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Abstract

The concept of normativity is currently enjoying a period in philosophical vogue; it is at the centre of contemporary debates in fields as diverse as ethics and epistemology. Despite its popularity, the question of how we might best understand normativity remains a disputed one. Generally speaking, philosophers have favoured an intellectualist interpretation. It is typically assumed, for instance, that our engaging our higher-order capacities, our capacities for judgment, deliberation and reasoning, constitutes a necessary condition for our being sensitive to normative phenomena. Recently, however, an increasing number of philosophers have made the case for our favouring an anti-intellectualist interpretation, on the grounds, for example, that intellectualist frameworks are overly restrictive. In this study I assess these two competing accounts of normativity at the level of their respective positions regarding the connection between guidance by norms and guidance by reasons. Typically, intellectualists hold that if a norm is to guide action such that that action is also guided by reasons it is necessary that it be a norm which has some clear association with judgment and deliberation. Anti-intellectualists typically disagree; they are not inclined to see a norm's being disconnected from judgment and deliberation as decisive against that norm's guiding action which is also guided by reasons. In the first chapter I present Allan Gibbard's intellectualist analysis of the connection between guidance by norms and guidance by reasons. I show how Gibbard's expressivistic analysis of normative discourse supports his intellectualism. In the second chapter I introduce Peter Railton's anti-intellectualist analysis of this connection. I conclude this chapter by presenting a *prima facie* reason for our favouring Railton's analysis. In the third chapter I examine the metaphysical, semantic and epistemic components of the metaethical position which underwrites Railton's anti-intellectualism before raising an objection to the semantic and epistemic components. I argue that this objection gives us reason to find Railton’s anti-intellectualism untenable. In the fourth chapter I explore the prospects for both anti-intellectualism and intellectualism in light of these problems for Railton’s account.
This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface; due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other materials used; the thesis is (word count) words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1

Norms and reasons: an expressivistic analysis

1. Norm-expressivism, rational action and reasons 10
2. Being in the grip of a norm 13
3. Norm-acceptance and language-specific normative practices 13
4. How expressivism supports intellectualism about norm-guidance 17
5. Summary 18

Chapter 2

Rethinking norm-guidance: norms, reasons and anti-intellectualism

1. Some problems for intellectualism 19
2. Norms, action and regulatory explanations 20
3. Norms, attitudes and two senses of rationality 21
4. Prima facie reasons to prefer Railton’s analysis of norm-guidance 24
5. Implications for a conception of normativity 27
6. Summary 27

Chapter 3

Reasons, norms and normative realism

1. General remarks on Railton’s metaethics: normative realism as a naturalistic enterprise 30
2. What normative properties might be 31
3. Non-moral properties and causal-explanatory role: the wants/interests mechanism 32
4. How causal features of normative properties support a causal semantics and a theory of quasi-epistemic access 34
Introduction

I

It is fair to say that the concept of normativity is currently enjoying a period in philosophical vogue. Philosophers working in fields as diverse as ethics, epistemology and the philosophies of language and mind have found occasion for its application within contemporary debates. Although it is by no means clear that these various applications, when taken together, yield a single and cohesive concept, there does appear, nevertheless, to be substantial agreement between them with respect to normativity’s necessary preconditions.

For instance, philosophers typically argue that normative phenomena are intimately connected to what we might call our higher-order capacities, our capacity for judgment, reasoning, and reflection. Christine Korsgaard, in her influential *The Sources of Normativity*, can best be understood as seeking to establish the existence of a connection of precisely this kind. Korsgaard contends that it is only because of our capacity to achieve reflective distance from the various desires and impulses that present themselves to us that we are able to find something normative. The engagement of this capacity gives rise to what Korsgaard terms the ‘normative question’: “I desire and I find myself with a powerful impulse to act. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn’t dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I act? Is this desire really a reason to act?”¹ The way in which I ought to go about answering this question, Korsgaard thinks, is by asking, from my distanced perspective, whether I can endorse the impulse under my consideration; if I find that I am, then that impulse takes on a normative quality.

Korsgaard’s account, insofar as it takes our engaging our higher-order capacities, our capacities for judgment, reasoning and reflection, to constitute a necessary condition for our being sensitive to normative phenomena, is representative of what I will hereafter refer to as *intellectualist* analyses of normativity. Whilst most theorists take the accuracy of such analyses for granted, the question of precisely how the engagement of our higher-order capacities might make possible this sensitivity is controversial. A purpose of this study is to throw light on this question by raising problems for some specific forms of intellectualism and exploring possible measures through which these problems might be overcome.

One prominent critic of intellectualist analyses of normativity is Peter Railton. In his article ‘Normative Guidance’, Railton, first, develops a number of criticisms of the intellectualist’s picture of normativity, which he believes, “locate[s] the center of mass of our norm-guided selves too high …”\(^2\), and, second, seeks to establish the basis for a dissenting, anti-intellectualist account. One aim of this thesis is to determine the extent to which Railton’s account constitutes a viable alternative to more traditional analyses. A problem presents itself immediately in this connection. For in order to adequately assess Railton’s account against its competitors, we need to have a relatively clear idea of the kind of criteria a theory of normativity must satisfy in order to count as successful. There is little agreement, however, as to what these criteria might be.

A promising place to begin is with the connection between normativity and normative practical reasons. The sense of normative I intend here and throughout this study bears a connection to justification. A normative reason in this sense is a reason which justifies a course of action as opposed, for instance, to simply explaining why an agent pursued that course. On a typical understanding, normativity involves the guidance of our actions, thoughts, and so on, by norms, rules or standards. Typically, theorists have assumed a relation between an action’s being guided by norms and an action’s being guided by reasons. There is significant disagreement, however, as to how exactly this connection between reason-guidance and normativity ought to be spelt out. Specifically, the disagreement is centred on the role which norms play in securing this connection. Are all norms equally capable of guiding action such that that action is also guided by reasons, or ought we to be focusing on some privileged subset?

Generally speaking, intellectualists have argued for the latter; when giving an account of normativity they have tended to favour those norms which bear a clear connection to our higher-order deliberative capacities. Typically, these are norms which are associated with judgment, that is, endorsement, belief, and so on. So, for instance, it might be given as a constraint on one’s actions being reason-guided that the norms which guide that action be norms which one has endorsed. Predictably, those who take issue with intellectualism, such as Railton, are inclined to dispute this rendering of the norm-reason relationship. Broadly speaking, anti-intellectualists are not disposed to see a norm’s being disconnected from judgment as decisive against its guiding action such that that action is also reason-guided.

One final point before moving on to a synopsis of the argument: rather than talk cumbersome about ‘a conception of the connection between reason-guidance and normativity’ I will refer to an analysis of norm-guidance. Suffice it to say that the concept of norm-guidance is intended to capture that of reason-guidance; an analysis of norm-guidance is an analysis which specifies criteria under which a norm can be said to guide action such that that action is also guided by reasons.

II

This study consists of four chapters. In the first chapter I present an intellectualist account of norm-guidance, namely, that developed by Allan Gibbard in Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. I begin with some general observations concerning Gibbard’s broader project, emphasising his anti-realism about normative properties and the expressivistic form which this anti-realism takes, before focusing on the resultant account of reasons. From here I am led to a discussion of the psychological state which Gibbard refers to as accepting a norm, an investigation of what this state consists in and what its connections to normative judgment are. My ultimate aim is to trace the route which connects Gibbard’s anti-realism, in the form of expressivism, with his intellectualism. In so doing I hope to show how the former conduces to, and ultimately supports, the latter.

In the second chapter I introduce Railton’s alternative, anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance. I begin by canvassing Railton’s dissatisfaction with intellectualism. Following this, I discuss some of the problems which he identifies for prevailing analyses of what it is for an action to be guided by a norm whether or not that action is also guided by reasons, before presenting his alternative ‘regulatory’ analysis. Next, I consider Railton’s position on norm-guidance proper, at the centre of which is the claim that, contra Gibbard, “No privileged attitude … accounts for the role of norms in shaping our lived world and contributing to the reasons for which we act.”\(^3\) I explore the assumptions about rationality and agency which underwrite this claim before presenting a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account of norm-guidance. I conclude with some remarks about the implications of our doing so for a preferred conception of normativity.

In the third chapter I show how Railton proposes to vindicate the claim, which is at the centre of his anti-intellectualism, that norms which bear no discernible association with judgment and deliberation might nevertheless guide action such that that action is also guided

\(^3\) Railton, “Normative Guidance”, p. 31
by reasons. To this end I investigate, in the first section of the chapter, the metaphysical, semantic and epistemic components of the metaethical position which supports Railton’s anti-intellectualism. I begin by discussing Railton’s metaphysical realism about normative properties, before showing how Railton’s realism supports, first, a semantic thesis, and second, an epistemic, or rather, quasi-epistemic thesis. I show that this notion of quasi-epistemic access supports Railton’s anti-intellectualism insofar as it details how norms not associated with judgment or deliberation might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. In the second half of this chapter I raise an objection to the semantic component of Railton’s metaethical position and note the implications for the quasi-epistemic component and for Railton’s anti-intellectualism more generally. I argue that this objection give us reason to find Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance untenable.

In the fourth and concluding chapter I investigate the prospects for both anti-intellectualist and intellectualist accounts of norm-guidance in light of the objection which we raised in connection with Railton’s account in Chapter 3. I begin by summarising the challenge which faces the proponent of anti-intellectualism. Following this, I turn my focus to intellectualism. I ask whether by deferring to a notion of implicit judgment, intellectualism might be better equipped to accommodate more of the relevant phenomena. From here I am led to a discussion of the notion of implicit judgment, the criteria which a judgment must satisfy to count as such, and so on. I conclude with some remarks on intellectualism and normativity.
Chapter 1

Norms and reasons: an expressivistic analysis

One of the most comprehensive and detailed recent analyses of normative discourse is developed by Allan Gibbard in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. Gibbard’s analysis, or rather, aspects of it, constitutes the focus of the present chapter. Since our principal interest is the analysis’ implications for an account of norm-guidance, my presentation is selective. I begin with some general observations concerning Gibbard’s broader project, emphasising his anti-realism about normative properties and the expressivistic form which this anti-realism takes, before focusing on the resultant account of reasons. From here I am led to a discussion of the psychological state which Gibbard refers to as accepting a norm, an investigation of what this state consists in and what its connections to normative judgment are. My ultimate aim is to trace the route which connects Gibbard’s anti-realism, in the form of expressivism, with his intellectualism. In so doing I aim to show how the former conduces to, and ultimately supports, the latter.

1. Norm-expressivism, rational action and reasons

Gibbard’s principal aim in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* is to provide an account of normative judgment, where a normative judgment is understood as, roughly, an avowable evaluative attitude (we will return to this notion and its ties to avowal in § 4). Gibbard takes as paradigmatic those judgments which ascribe or withhold rationality and irrationality. Indeed, a desire to render intelligible precisely what it is we are doing when we make judgments involving these notions motivates Gibbard’s entire project: “What does it mean to call an alternative rational, or another irrational? That is the puzzle of the book …”

Gibbard’s account starts here, with the notions of rationality and irrationality, because he believes that an analysis of these notions in the context of normative judgment will constitute a vantage point from which to comprehend our deliberative practices in their entirety. Gibbard believes this because he maintains that when we deliberate about whether we should perform a certain action, or think or feel a certain way, we are essentially asking ourselves whether that action or that thought or that feeling would be the rational one, where ‘rational’, conceived broadly and devoid of its scholarly purport, simply means ‘makes sense’.

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5 Ibid., p. 6. Indeed, “Other phrases may capture this notion better …With feelings and beliefs, we can talk of what states of mind are “warranted”, “well grounded”, or “apt”; with acts we can talk of the "best thing to do". We might talk simply of “the thing to do” or “the thing to feel” about something.” p. 49
One way to go about solving the puzzle which Gibbard sets himself is to interpret judgments involving rationality and irrationality as straightforwardly descriptive or cognitive, that is, as purporting to describe some fact or state of affairs, and thus as truth-apt in precisely the same way as standard non-normative judgments. On this view the function of ‘X is rational’, say, is best understood as consisting in the ascription of the property of being rational to X. Gibbard, however, eschews this approach, and part of the reason for his doing so is that he is an anti-realist with respect to normative properties. The notion that there is instantiated some normative property or set of properties corresponding to the term ‘rational’, or, indeed, any normative term, which it could be the function of normative judgments to ascribe, is, consequently, to Gibbard’s way of thinking, fundamentally mistaken.  

So what interpretation of normative judgments does Gibbard favour? Gibbard’s theory is expressivistic with regard to normative judgments and, indeed, normative language more generally. On this account, normative discourse plays an essentially expressive function. Accordingly, analyses of normative concepts, such as rational, best proceed, Gibbard thinks, by trying to identify exactly what it is which the relevant term serves to express: “We explain the term by saying what state of mind it expresses.” It is for this reason that Gibbard’s primary concern rests with what it means to call a course of action rational and not, say, with what it is for a course of action to be rational. For only in asking the former question are we asking directly about the expressive function of the term.

What is the expressive function of the term ‘rational’? According to Gibbard, to call a course of action rational is to endorse it in some way, but not, we must reaffirm, by assigning to that action any particular property, even the property of making sense. Rather, when we call a course of action rational we endorse it by expressing our acceptance of norms that

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6 By itself, a metaphysical position of this kind falls short of entailing non-cognitivism. One could, as many in fact have, deny that normative properties are ever instantiated whilst maintaining that normative judgments purport to function descriptively. A position of this kind would find normative judgments to be systematically false. Gibbard’s broader dispute with descriptivism, however, prevents him from adopting this position. According to Gibbard, descriptivist analyses of normative terms such as ‘rational’ routinely fail insofar as they, “[miss] the chief point of calling something ‘rational’: the endorsement the term connotes.” More recently, Gibbard has embraced a more conciliatory approach towards the idea of normative properties. See Allan Gibbard, Thinking How to Live (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

7 Ibid., p. 8
permit it. Gibbard calls this analysis of what it means to call a course of action rational the *norm-expressivistic analysis.*

There is a connection, on Gibbard’s view, between the notion of a course of action’s being rational and the notion of a thing’s being a reason, which we can express thus: “To say it is rational to do something is to say that doing it is supported by the preponderance of reasons.” An equivalence of this kind might initially appear to constitute a foundation upon which to ground a more substantive analysis of the notion of an act’s being rational. For if we can say what it means for something to count as a reason then this equivalence appears to entail that we can thereby say, albeit indirectly, what it is for an act to be rational. The notion of a reason, however, is, like the notions of rational and irrational, normative. Consequently, any attempt at its elucidation which proceeds by seeking to locate some property or set of properties to which the term may refer, is, on Gibbard’s view, misguided, for it relies on realist assumptions which Gibbard has already staunchly rejected. On an expressivistic account, when we judge such-and-such to be a reason, just as when we judge such-and-such to be rational, we are not making a judgment of fact, but, rather, expressing a state of mind. Thus, as before, our efforts should be directed not towards providing necessary and sufficient conditions for something’s being a reason, but rather at isolating the state of mind we express when we treat something as a reason. Gibbard’s norm-expressivistic analysis yields the following answer: “When a person calls something—call it *R*—a reason for doing *X*, he expresses his acceptance of norms that say to treat *R* as weighing in favour of doing *X*.“ Thinking about reasons in this way vindicates the equivalence, but it tells us nothing new about what it means for a course of action to be rational, nor, indeed, about what it means to call a course of action rational.

It is worth pausing here to emphasise the implications which this analysis has for the notion of *having a reason*. For Gibbard, there is nothing more to, say, *y*’s being a reason for doing *x* beyond our simply judging *y* to be a reason for doing *x*, where to judge *y* to be a reason is to perform an essentially expressive act. Thus, on Gibbard’s view, the notion of having a reason is to be explained in terms of judging oneself to have a reason. We will return to this point towards the end of this chapter and again at the conclusion of Chapter 2.

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8 Ibid., p. 7. This formulation of the norm-expressivistic thesis is presented as a “rough hypothesis”. Indeed, much of the remainder of the book is given over to its refinement. I contend, however, that all that is relevant to the current inquiry is present in this formulation.
9 Ibid., p. 8. *Vis-à-vis* a course of action’s being rational: “It follows that if we want to decide what really is rational, we shall have to settle what norms to accept ourselves—for that is what it is to form an opinion as to the rationality of something.” p. 47
10 Ibid., p. 161
11 Ibid., p. 163
For now, however, let us continue our examination of Gibbard’s analysis of normative discourse.

2. Being in the grip of a norm

By appealing to the notion of accepting a norm, Gibbard’s norm-expressivistic analysis of normative judgment is able to provide an account of what it means to treat something as a reason. Clearly, if it is to prove a functional analysis this notion of accepting a norm must itself be elucidated. It is necessary that such an elucidation demonstrate, first, what the psychological state of accepting a norm consists in, and, second, why we should think that it is precisely this psychological state which is expressed by normative judgments and not some other state. With a view to providing an elucidation of this kind, let us follow Gibbard and contrast the psychological state of accepting a norm with a state which Gibbard calls being in the grip of a norm.

According to Gibbard, I am in the grip of a norm in those cases where I accept a norm as having most weight in my circumstances yet my actions nevertheless continue to be guided by some other norm.12 In such cases the norm which succeeds in guiding my actions is the norm that I have most strongly internalised.13 The psychological state of being in the grip of a norm is perhaps most clearly exemplified in cases of weakness of will, specifically those cases in which the source of the will’s frustration is not some bodily appetite but, rather, some social motivation. Gibbard cites Milgram’s series of psychological experiments on weakness of will in this connection.14 In Milgram’s experiments subjects were instructed to administer electric shocks to a second subject concealed from view. Although the concealed subject was not in fact being shocked, the subject administering the shocks was led to believe otherwise; to the best of their knowledge the shocks for which they were responsible were the cause of extreme pain in the concealed subject. Despite protesting vigorously, roughly two-thirds of the subjects eventually carried out administering the shocks as instructed.

The significance of Milgram cases for Gibbard’s project is that the subjects who followed through on the commands they were given routinely set aside norms which they accepted as having most weight in their circumstances, namely norms forbidding the intentional infliction of harm, in favour of norms which they acknowledged as having less weight but had more deeply internalised, namely norms prescribing cooperation and obedience. That they do in fact apportion weight to the respective sets of norms in this

12 Ibid., p. 60. For a sustained discussion of being in the grip of a norm see pp. 58-61.
13 Ibid., p. 71. For a sustained discussion of internalising a norm see pp. 68-71.
14 Ibid., pp. 58-61. For the original presentation of the experiment and results see Milgram (1974)
manner is borne out, Gibbard believes, by the force and persistency of their protests. Insofar as they acted on the basis of norms they did not accept, the subjects can be said to have exemplified the psychological state of being in the grip of a norm.

3. Norm-acceptance and language-specific normative practices

On what basis ought we to differentiate the state of being in the grip of a norm from that of accepting a norm? With a view to answering this question let us seek a firmer hold on what the psychological state of accepting a norm might consist in. According to Gibbard, our capacity to accept norms constitutes a biological adaptation.\(^{15}\) The capacity is adaptive, Gibbard thinks, insofar as it facilitates coordinated expectations between members of a group, which, in turn, provides a basis for coordinated behaviour.\(^{16}\) In itself, understanding norm-acceptance on the model of an adaptive strategy is not sufficient to adequately separate it from a variety of other psychological states, which, according to Gibbard, have themselves a coordinative function.\(^ {17}\) Rather, it is norm-acceptance’s privileged connection to our capacities for language and reasoning which serves best to distinguish it. Let us look at how such capacities might tell us something important about precisely what the psychological state of accepting a norm consists in.

What is perhaps most remarkable about language, considered in the context of the present discussion, is its granting to speakers the ability to engage in collective deliberation, or what Gibbard terms normative discussion, over absent situations. In so doing it introduces the possibility of coordinating expectations in a way which is at once both novel and highly sophisticated. Begin by considering the degree of detail with which language enables one to ‘set the scene’, so to speak, to introduce to others a situation for discussion. A capacity for verbal description, comparison, and so on, allows the context to be enumerated in terrific detail, laying the foundation for speakers to then ‘unite’ around a keenly specified normative problem. Once this problem is set out the discussion functions as a forum in which speakers are able to avow their evaluative attitudes. Opinions about what it makes sense to do under the circumstances, what constitutes a right and wrong, a good and bad, action are rigorously shared, criticisms are given, clarifications are asked for, speakers are won over or else required to defend their positions. Gradually, normative positions are staked out.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 7
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 65
\(^{17}\) See, for instance, Gibbard’s discussion of norm-internalisation, p. 69
Note that it is within this context of normative discussion that we best understand what Gibbard means by a normative judgment. It might be thought that a normative judgment consisted in some essentially private act, perhaps one in which an individual ‘tells him or herself’ that such-and-such is the correct way to feel about a certain situation. On a conception of this kind, that a speaker possessed a disposition towards the avowal of that judgment would be an entirely contingent feature of that speaker’s having made a judgment at all. It is important it be made clear that this is not the conception with which Gibbard is working. It is a necessary condition of one’s having made a normative judgment, in Gibbard’s sense, that one possesses a disposition towards the avowal of that judgment within the context of normative discussion. The ties which bind judgment to our linguistic and higher-order functions are, on this conception, amplified; just as a capacity for language and deliberative reasoning are a precondition for engaging in normative discussion, so too are they necessary for the forming of normative judgments.

But what of the connection between normative discussion and the psychological state of accepting a norm? Returning to this question let us take a closer look at two mechanisms at work within normative discussion. We noted that such discussion consists, in part, in discussants avowing normative positions. Clearly, there are constraints in this respect. For instance, I cannot avow just any position I feel like; I will be expected to offer justification. It will count against my claim to that position if that justification is shown to be inconsistent with normative precepts to which I have previously appealed or indicated I accept. My fellow discussants will expect of me that my normative positions, considered collectively, exhibit a consistency, that my reasoning for one does not conflict with my reasoning for another, and so on. In other words, there is such a thing as responsible engagement in normative discussion. Such engagement will be sensitive to demands for consistency, where sensitivity to these demands requires that a position or set of positions be modified should they be revealed to harbour an inconsistency. Indeed, it is reasonable to expect that I will come to hold my reasoning accountable to tests of this kind more generally, outside of the context of normative discussion, perhaps in its preparation or simply as a matter of routine.

A second mechanism relates to the tendency amongst discussants to modify their normative positions in response to the avowals of others. Such modification needs not amount to complete or immediate acquiescence. Very often the realisation that one’s position appeals to flawed reasoning or relies on unsound assumptions can provide the impetus for the

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18 Ibid., p. 74
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 73
development of new arguments rather than for the modification of one’s conclusions. Indeed, being capable of some resistance in the face of the avowals of others, no matter how reasonable they appear, is crucial if one is to avoid manipulation.\textsuperscript{21} If resistance of this kind were all there was to normative discussion, however, such discussion would only ever result in the further entrenchment of discussants within their respective normative positions. But this is clearly not the case. Often when we engage in debate we are persuaded, to a greater or lesser extent, by one another’s reasoning. Lacking persuadability altogether would render one an unfavourable companion in discussion and a candidate for ostracism.\textsuperscript{22}

Taken together, these two mechanisms, responsiveness to the demand for consistency and mutual influence, drive normative discussion towards consensus.\textsuperscript{21} When there is consensus regarding what we think it rational to do, to think or to feel in the relevant situation, there is a coordination of expectations, a coordination which is fitness-enhancing, as we have already noted, insofar as it provides the basis for coordinated action should that situation manifest itself.

Coordinated expectations may provide the basis for coordinated action, but they do not guarantee such action. We may, after all, avow certain norms in the context of normative discussion, yet abandon those same norms when the occasion for action presents itself. Nevertheless, Gibbard claims, it seems clear that the norms to which we cleave in normative discussion exert some influence over what we do, think or feel when the occasion for their translation into action presents itself. Gibbard terms this influence normative governance.\textsuperscript{24}

It is Gibbard’s contention that accepting a norm is to be understood in terms of these language-specific, higher-order normative practices of normative discussion and normative governance, and their associated mechanisms. Specifically, accepting a norm entails having a set of dispositions with respect to those practices and mechanisms. For instance, if one accepts a norm then one is disposed to avow that norm in normative discussion.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, one is disposed to do so in light of the demands for consistency which are exerted through normative discussion and to adjust one’s positions in response to the normative avowals of others.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, if one accepts a norm and consequently is disposed to avow it in normative discussion, then one has a tendency to conform to it with respect to one’s actions.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 78
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 77
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 73
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 72
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 74
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 75
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Accepting a norm, Gibbard wants to say, “is whatever psychic state, if any, gives rise to this syndrome of avowal of the norm and governance by it.”

In light of our discussion it is clear that the psychological states of accepting a norm and being in the grip of a norm are not entirely dissimilar. Both, for instance, entail a motivational disposition to treat a norm as a basis for action. As we have seen, however, accepting a norm entails a set of further dispositions, namely dispositions with respect to normative discussion and governance. The state of being in the grip of a norm, insofar as it lacks ties to these normative practices, entails no such dispositions. It is on this basis, I suggest, that we might most clearly differentiate the state of accepting a norm from that of being in the grip of a norm.

Recall that it is essential to the notion of a normative judgment in Gibbard’s sense that one possesses a disposition towards the avowal of that judgment within the context of normative discussion. Hence Gibbard’s insistence that norm acceptance, the state that is expressed by normative judgments, entail dispositions towards avowal.

4. How expressivism supports intellectualism about norm-guidance

The picture of norm-guidance which emerges from our discussion of Gibbard’s analysis of normative judgment is decidedly intellectualist. According to Gibbard, an analysis of reasons ought to be orientated around an examination of our discourse about reasons. Central to this discourse, and consequently to our examination, are our judgments about reasons. It is plausible to think that the norms which these judgments express are, as Gibbard suggests, the norms which we accept, where accepting a norm is understood to entail particular dispositions with respect to normative discussion, dispositions towards avowal, dispositions towards a responsiveness to demands for consistency, and so on. Thus emerges a picture according to which it is norms belonging to a privileged set, viz. those associated with the psychological state of acceptance, which, by virtue of their connection to our judgments about reasons, are relevant to reasons and to norm-guided action.

We are well positioned to see how Gibbard’s expressivism supports this intellectualism. Normative expressivism, a species of anti-realism, rejects the contention that normative properties, such as the property of being a reason, are ever instantiated. Consequently, there are no properties which norms that do not possess the relevant ties to normative discussion and to our normative judgments, norms which have us in their grip, for instance, might track.

28 Ibid.
5. Summary

My aim in this chapter has been to trace the route that leads Gibbard from expressivism to intellectualism about norm-guidance. We began by acquainting ourselves with Gibbard’s norm-expressivistic theory of normative judgment and the analysis of reasons which it yields. On this analysis, we noted, having a reason is to be explained in terms of our judging ourselves to have a reason, where to judge thusly is to perform an essentially expressive act. From here we were led to a discussion of the psychological state which Gibbard’s refers to as accepting a norm, in particular an investigation of the ties which this state bears to the practices of normative discussion and governance and to normative judgment. We concluded by noting that Gibbard is an intellectualist about norm-guidance and summarising how Gibbard’s expressivism supports this intellectualism.
Chapter 2

Rethinking norm-guidance: norms, reasons and anti-intellectualism

In the previous chapter we traced the route that leads Gibbard from anti-realism about normative properties to an intellectualist account of norm-guidance. In the present chapter I consider a competing anti-intellectualist account, namely, that put forward by Peter Railton in his article ‘Normative Guidance’. I begin by canvassing Railton’s dissatisfaction with intellectualism. Following this, I discuss some of the problems which he identifies for prevailing analyses of what it is for an action to be guided by a norm whether or not that action is also guided by reasons, before presenting his alternative ‘regulatory’ analysis. Next, I consider Railton’s position on norm-guidance proper. At the centre of this position is the claim that, contra Gibbard, “No privileged attitude … accounts for the role of norms in shaping our lived world and contributing to the reasons for which we act.”29 I explore the assumptions about rationality and agency which underwrite this claim before presenting a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account of norm-guidance. I conclude with some remarks about the implications of our doing so for a preferred conception of normativity.

1. Some problems for intellectualism

Railton’s dissatisfaction with intellectualist analyses of norm-guidance stems from their organising themselves around what he perceives to be too narrow an interpretation of the relevance of norms for reason-guided action. Focusing as they do on the, “domain of self-conscious, deliberative judgment”,30 such analyses dismiss, prematurely as far as Railton is concerned, action which cannot be systematically traced to this domain as anomalous or essentially irrational, and thus as more or less irrelevant to any enquiry into reasons and rational action. In so doing they leave us with a distorted and incomplete picture of the phenomena. Part of the problem, Railton thinks, is the general tendency to want to explain norm-guidance from a “unified perspective external to the agents themselves.”31 This is a problem insofar as it encourages, or at least offers no resistance to, intellectualist idealisations and generalisations, which, Railton believes, have been incorporated, consciously or otherwise, into our explanations of norm-guidance. An investigation which began instead,

29 Railton, “Normative Guidance”, p. 31
30 Ibid., p. 4
31 Ibid., p. 3
“from the inside of agents, from their centres of mass as agents and moral beings”⁸, would show such generalisations to be baseless, and in so doing force us towards a broadened conception of the way in which norms function to guide action such that that action is also guided by reasons. Railton’s article can be read as an attempt to provide an investigation of precisely this kind.

2. Norms guiding action and regulatory explanations

Railton begins this investigation by asking what it is for an action to be guided by a norm regardless of whether that action is also guided by reasons. Typically, intellectualists are inclined to answer this question by deferring to an agent’s making some judgment, for instance, the judgment that the relevant action is norm-compliant. However, what is striking, Railton thinks, is the extent to which such judgment is absent. To demonstrate this point he appeals, as he does in numerous connections throughout ‘Normative Guidance’, to a case study. Railton asks us to consider Martha and Rick, two academic colleagues, as they walk together on their way to give their respective classes. As they go they converse with one another in a relaxed, informal manner, about goings-on in the department, the week’s visiting speaker, and so on. Their interaction appears effortless: “What seems so spontaneous, however, is the result of complex inner workings, largely below the surface of experience.”⁹ These ‘inner workings’ manifest themselves in, among other things, the sensitivity which Martha and Rick display to one another’s body language, a sensitivity which facilitates the smooth flow of conversation and coordinated shifts which move it from topic to topic, as well as in their responsiveness to events around them, the movements and body language of passers-by, and so on. We can expect that many of the infinitesimal number of choices which find expression through Martha and Rick’s behaviour, those, for instance, concerning gait, eye-contact, cadence, and language, are made in the absence of any judgment or deliberation. Indeed, there is little evidence of higher-order functioning at all:

That is not at all because the underlying structure of norms and intentions is simple … A complex constellation of norms is hard at work throughout — norms of sociability, language, assertion, communication, politeness, professional relations, sidewalk etiquette, and privacy — despite the automatic character of much of their action.¹⁰

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⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid., p. 4
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5
Thus, the significance of this case study for Railton’s purposes is that it shows the extent to which norms regularly guide our actions without the mediation of judgment or deliberation.

If it is not the formation of some judgment with respect to an action that marks the resultant behaviour as guided by a norm, then what is it? Consider Fred, who manifests a highly reliable disposition to validate his ticket when riding a bus: “Indeed, his disposition is highly reliable, so much so that he confidently expects himself to validate, and is mildly surprised when he occasionally notices that he has taken his seat without having done so.”

Why interpret Fred’s behaviour as anything other than mere habit? What distinctive feature might we point to in order to demonstrate the guiding presence of a norm? According to Railton, what would satisfy to distinguish Fred’s behaviour from habit is not Fred’s performing some explicit mental act, but, rather, his manifesting a disposition towards a certain response on those occasions when he fails to validate his ticket. Specifically, if, on such occasions, his mild surprise turns quickly to discomfort, he feels the need to rationalise his omission, and he takes steps to correct his behaviour, even on occasions when his omission goes unsanctioned, then Fred’s ticket-validating disposition, Railton wants to say, is more than habit. More generally, we can say that, for Railton, the mechanism which connects norm and action is regulatory in nature:

Regulative explanations of action deploy what is in effect the structure of a regulator, involving some form of self-monitoring for conformity to a standard or aim, departures from which cause the agent to make corresponding alterations in her course of thought, amount of effort, or direction of action to attain compliance …

Crucially, however, such alterations can, “be imperfect, and need not occur at the level of self-conscious awareness.” Railton cites in this connection the tendency of some interviewees to modify their posture, tone, and so on, in response to those of the interviewer.

In summary, Railton tells us that norm N guides action A, just in case N plays a regulatory role with respect to A. What is significant about this interpretation, for our purposes at least, is that it allows Railton to give conditions under which a norm guides an

35 Ibid., p. 9
36 Ibid., p. 10
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
action without recourse to judgment, belief or, indeed, any of the higher-order capacities which intellectualists typically want to say are essential to it.

3. Norms, attitudes and two senses of rationality

Thus far, our discussion has been focused on what it is for an action to be guided by a norm regardless of whether or not that action is also guided by reasons. What are the implications of this discussion for norm-guidance? Could we not provisionally accept Railton’s regulatory interpretation of what it is for an action to be guided by a norm and yet insist that if that action is also to be guided by reasons the relevant norm must be associated with some distinctive judgment-entailing psychological state, such as acceptance? As we ought to expect, Railton thinks not; he claims that, “No privileged attitude … accounts for the role of norms in shaping our lived world and contributing to the reasons for which we act.”

It is important to clarify that in saying as much Railton is not denying that those psychological states to which intellectualists typically defer when explaining norm-guidance are capable of playing the kind of role the intellectualists suggest they do. Railton’s point, rather, is that taken together they are not exhaustive of those states which are capable of doing so.

Consider in this connection Ed, who, following a period of intense despondency marked by alcoholism, recently sought a new beginning as a member of a strict religious community. The community’s leaders take rule-violation seriously and punish perpetrators by means of informal, yet severe, techniques, including public confession, shaming and denunciation, shunning, and so on. It is expected that all members of the community will play an active role in the administering of these techniques. Ed accepts this aspect of community life and feels no resentment when he himself is subjected to punishment. When it falls to him to inflict it, however, Ed cannot avoid acute feelings of shame. Passing a member he is required to shun, “he struggles awkwardly to avoid eye-contact, and cannot help but give some sign of recognition of the other’s existence through his hesitant, confused manner.”

After such encounters he is inclined to berate himself for what he takes to be his cowardice, for he genuinely believes that the rules which require him to administer punishment are justified.

As a child, Ed was taught that punishment ought to be respectful and administered in privacy by a parent. He deeply internalised these attitudes to punishment, later coming to

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39 Railton, “Normative Guidance”, p. 31
40 Ibid., p. 28
blame them for his tendency, in adulthood, towards self-indulgence, his lack of self-control, and so on. Although if asked, it is likely that Ed would resolutely reject these norms, it is clear that they nevertheless continue to exert a guiding influence.

Let us ask the question ‘Does the fact that Ed’s inability to inflict punishment upon his fellow community members is the result of his being guided by norms which he has internalised and does not accept mean that his behaviour is performed without his accessing reasons?’ For Gibbard the answer to this question can only be ‘Yes’. Ed, Gibbard would say, is in the grip of the norms which guide his behaviour. If these norms are to have anything to do with reasons, they must be norms he accepts, not norms he has internalised and does not accept. According to Railton, however, this response cleaves to too limited a conception of rationality, a conception according to which, “rationality is a capacity for reasoned decision and judgment. To find rationality in action we look for agents engaged in practical deliberation, treating considerations as reasons to act and setting themselves to act accordingly.” We ought, Railton thinks, to favour a broader conception, according to which we ought to understand rationality in terms of, “a capacity to be aptly responsive to reasons.” Responsiveness of this kind, Railton tells us, is sub-deliberative, analogous to the kind of non-inferential processes which, for instance, translate sensory evidence into perceptual representations.

This broadened conception of rationality underwrites an analogously broad notion of agency. Traditional theories take rational agency to consist in the exercise of an individual’s judgmental capacities. Rational agency in the broader sense, however,

is not located exclusively in the judgmental core, but distributed over the larger psyche and physiology of the human individual. To understand rational agency in the broad sense … we must start not at the seat of reasoning, but at the centre of mass of the person as a whole …

Internalised norms, an individual’s various desires, drives, dispositions and so forth, all contribute weight to this mass and assist in its stabilisation, functioning as they do, like a reason-sensitive ballast:

[41] Ibid., p. 23
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., p. 24
Taken together, they comprise the many ways in which the agent’s psyche and its embodiment equip him to be responsive to reasons, with or without the blessing of his judgmental or reasoning self.45

With respect to reasons for action the will is not, on this account, the irreproachable arbiter it is traditionally seen to be. Disregard for the will’s injunctions can, given the appropriate circumstances, bring our actions in closer accord with justificatory reasons. With regard to our identity as moral agents, for instance, weakness of will can prove a godsend, preventing, “our moral selves from being hijacked by the peculiar allure of high-minded principles and causes, which can win over our ‘better judgment’, but which often are radically out of touch with the actual nature of the lives affected and the values at stake …”46 Something analogous might, on Railton’s view, be said to hold true for our identity as agents more generally.47

One concern we might have about this particular rendering of what it is to be a rational agent is that it appears to sever the connection between rational and autonomous agency. Can we be said to be acting autonomously in cases where our actions are effectively guided by norms we do not recognise, even if our actions are guided by reasons? Railton thinks we can:

*Mature* autonomy … requires diverse counterbalances, so that no one channel of receptiveness to reasons, and no one locus for responding to these reasons, enjoys hegemony. Norms recalcitrant in the face of judgment … can add substance to our personality, lowering our centre of mass as agents and enhancing our stability when judgment has become benighted or enthralled.48

Recall that our question was: ‘Does the fact that Ed’s inability to inflict punishment upon his fellow community members is the result of his being guided by norms which he has internalised and does not accept mean that his behaviour is performed without his accessing reasons?’ We are now in a position to see how one might answer ‘No’ to this question. According to the broader conception of rational agency, that Ed’s behaviour is, to a large extent, governed by norms he rejects, is not sufficient reason for us to think that behaviour irrational or to think it not a consequence of Ed’s accessing reasons which justify it. For

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p. 30
47 *cf.* Harry Frankfurt: “A person’s judgment may itself be radically contrary to reason. Therefore, the fact that his judgment guides his conduct hardly means in itself that he is acting rationally. Indeed, it may well be that a failure of his will to accord with his judgment is precisely what saves him from irrationality.” *Rationality and the Unthinkable*, p. 189
48 Ibid., p. 31
Railton, as we have seen, rationality, construed broadly, consists in a capacity to be aptly responsive to reasons. Norms which Ed has internalised but does not accept can facilitate this capacity and thus guide behaviour which, despite its being disconnected from our judgments about reasons, is nevertheless also reason-guided. Relating this point back to our earlier discussion in connection with Gibbard, the capacity to accept norms, Railton would like to say, is a facet of Ed’s identity as a reasoning individual. Ed’s ability to act for reasons, however, transcends this identity. Consequently, if Railton is correct then Gibbard is wrong to think that the state of accepting a norm, or, indeed, any judgment-entailing psychological state, plays a privileged role with respect to reason-guided action.

4. Prima facie reasons to prefer Railton’s analysis of norm-guidance

We have before us two competing analyses of norm-guidance: first, Gibbard’s intellectualist analysis, our focus in Chapter 1, which holds that only norms belonging to a privileged subset, viz. those associated with the psychological state of acceptance, are capable of guiding action such that that action is also reason-guided; and, second, Railton’s anti-intellectualist alternative, which rejects the privileging of a single psychological state in this connection. In the following discussion I will present a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account, namely that it better accommodates the relevant phenomena than does Gibbard’s intellectualist analysis.

Perhaps the clearest way of bringing out the relevant differences between the two analyses is by comparing their assessments of what Nomy Arpaly calls inverse akrasia cases. These are cases where an agent goes against their better judgment, and as a consequence acts as we want to say they have most reason to. We have already considered one inverse akrasia case, namely, Ed’s. Ed takes himself to have an overriding reason to inflict punishment on those community members who have transgressed community rules. When he finds himself unable to translate this conviction into action he genuinely feels that he has failed to do what he has most reason to. Yet when considering Ed’s dilemma we may find it difficult to escape the intuition that Ed has got things wrong, that whatever the explanation for his being so, he is deluded about where his reasons lie. Accordingly, we are inclined to look upon Ed’s failure to manifest his convictions as a good thing.

We can imagine similar cases. Arpaly herself discusses a case taken from Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.\(^{50}\) Having formed a friendship with a slave called Jim and assisted in his escape, Huckleberry finds himself faced with a dilemma: on the one hand he knows that helping a slave to escape is tantamount to stealing and he does not wish to steal; on the other, in handing Jim in he will be committing an act of betrayal and he believes one ought not to betray one’s friends. Huckleberry gives the situation some thought before deciding that, all things considered, stealing would be a worse thing than betraying Jim, and so he decides that the right thing to do is to turn Jim in. Yet when the opportunity presents itself Huckleberry finds he cannot bring himself to do so. Although he berates himself for not having the courage to do what he decided he ought to, in not turning Jim in, in going against his better judgment, we want to say that Huckleberry does the right thing.

Crucially, our intuition in both Ed’s and Huckleberry’s cases is not simply that they have acted in accordance with the reasons which they have, but, rather, that they have done what they have reason to do *because they have reason to do it*. To borrow Arpaly’s terms, we take there to be a connection between the reasons for which they acted and the right-making features of their actions. For instance, in Huckleberry’s case we do not wish simply to say that Huckleberry’s doing the right thing, his not turning Jim in, is a consequence, say, of a desire on his part to frustrate Jim’s master. Rather, we take it to be Huckleberry’s sensitivity to Jim’s personhood or his humanness, the very things which we want to say are decisive with respect to Huckleberry’s reasons, which is responsible for Huckleberry’s acting as he does. In other words, we want to say that Huckleberry’s actions, and Ed’s alike, are not simply in accordance with reasons but, rather, *reason-guided*.

From the point of view of Gibbard’s analysis, and, indeed, expressivism more generally, it is, strictly speaking, incoherent to say that Huckleberry’s and Ed’s actions are guided by reasons. The problem is that the reasons which we want to say are guiding Huckleberry’s and Ed’s actions are not reasons which they judge themselves to have but, rather, reasons which we want to say they have in spite of their judgments. As we noted in Chapter 1, § 1, however, in connection with Gibbard’s being an anti-realist about normative properties, this distinction, the distinction between the reasons we judge ourselves to have and the reasons we *in fact* have, is one the legitimacy of which Gibbard seems committed to denying. On Gibbard’s view, having a reason is to be explained essentially in terms of judging oneself to have a reason. Binding our having reasons to our judgments about reasons in this way means that for Gibbard there are no metaphysically robust reasons which our non-

\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 75-78
judgmental or non-deliberative capacities can track. Consequently, it entails a constraint on, for instance, the range of norms which can facilitate norm-guided action: to be guided by reasons the norms which guide one's actions must be norms which bear a connection of the right sort to our judgments about reasons, namely, norms we accept. Insofar as the norms which are responsible for Ed’s failing to participate in the community’s punishment practices and Huckleberry’s failing to turn Jim in are norms which neither Ed nor Huckleberry accepts, respectively, but, rather, norms which have them in their grip, Gibbard appears committed to denying outright that their behaviour could be reason-guided.

Gibbard's response fails to vindicate our sense that there is a strong continuity between Ed's and Huckleberry's cases and more typical cases of reason-guidance, cases where our judgmental capacities appear essential. For anti-intellectualists such as Railton, positing such a clear demarcation between these two sets of cases is arbitrary. On Railton’s view an account of norm-guidance ought to preserve this sense of continuity. Key to Railton’s doing precisely this is his contention that we have the capacity to be responsive to our bona fide reasons in circumstances where our judgments about our reasons are simply wrong. Norms which we do not accept, along with our desires, dispositions, and so forth, can facilitate this responsiveness in circumstances of precisely this kind. Thus, on Railton’s view, that the norms which guide Ed’s and Huckleberry’s actions are norms which have them in their grip does not exclude the possibility that Ed and Huckleberry are being guided by reasons.

I have presented a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account. As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, however, there may be other considerations that weigh against this reason.

5. Implications for a conception of normativity

I want to note briefly the implications which our favouring Railton’s account has for a preferred conception of normativity. Recall that the prevailing conception takes our possessing a capacity for judgment, deliberation, and reasoning to constitute a necessary condition for our being sensitive to normative phenomena. In light of the preceding discussion it would appear that this conception is unduly restrictive. In Ed’s and Huckleberry’s cases, for instance, we want to say that the imperativeness to conform their actions to guiding reasons manifests itself through apparently non-judgmental mechanisms. More broadly, we want to say that their sensitivity to normatively salient features of their environment does not appear localised in their judgmental “core” but, rather, to be dissipated throughout the conscious and unconscious aspects of their psyche. Accordingly, it appears
that we ought to favour a broader conception of normativity than that which is typically given by the intellectualist.

6. Summary

We began this chapter by canvassing Railton’s dissatisfaction with intellectualism. Following this, we considered some problems which Railton raises for prevailing accounts of what it is for an action to be guided by a norm whether or not that action is also guided by reasons, before moving on to consider his alternative regulatory account. From here we moved to a discussion of Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance proper, according to which norms which do not bear a clear association to judgment or deliberation may nevertheless guide action which is also guided by reasons. Next, we explored the assumptions about rationality and agency which underwrite this account. We saw that key in this connection is the claim that rationality consists not solely in reasoned decision and judgment but, rather, in a capacity to be aptly responsive to reasons. Following this we considered a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account of norm-guidance. We concluded by noting the implications of our doing so for a preferred conception of normativity.
Chapter 3

Reasons, norms and normative realism

We concluded Chapter 2 by considering a *prima facie* reason for our favouring Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance, namely that it better accommodates the relevant phenomena. In the first half of this chapter I ask how Railton proposes to vindicate his central anti-intellectualist contention: that norms essentially disconnected from our judgmental capacities might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. To this end I examine the metaethical assumptions which underwrite Railton's anti-intellectualism. I begin by discussing Railton's normative realism and sketch one particular response which is open to those, such as Railton, who wish to defend a realist account of reasons, and of normative properties more generally, against the anti-realist challenge. This response appeals to the apparent role of normative properties in causal explanations. I then intend to show how this response supports, first, a semantic thesis, namely that the reference relation between a normative term and the corresponding property is a matter of there existing, between that term and property, causal connections of the appropriate kind, and, second, an epistemic or, rather, *quasi*-epistemic thesis, namely that our direct causal interaction with the relevant normative property constitutes a kind of quasi-epistemic access with respect to that property. I show that this notion of quasi-epistemic access is key to Railton's anti-intellectualism insofar as it details how norms which are disconnected from our judgmental capacities might nevertheless establish a route to reasons.

In the second half of this chapter I raise an objection to the semantic component of Railton’s metaethical position. Roughly, this objection is centred on the claim that deference to causal connections delivers the wrong referent in the case of normative terms. I conclude by noting the implications which this objection has for Railton’s notion of quasi-epistemic access and for his anti-intellectualist conception of norm-guidance more generally.

1. General remarks on Railton’s metaethics: normative realism as a naturalistic enterprise
In Chapter 2 we noted that according to Railton, rationality consists in our having a capacity to be aptly responsive to reasons. This capacity appears to assume that reasons are substantive metaphysical entities which we encounter through standard empirical means. This is an assumption which we can reasonably expect someone like Gibbard to reject. Recall that as far as Gibbard is concerned, talk of reasons as somehow ‘there in the world’ is confused. The idea, then, that reasons might be suitably metaphysically robust to sustain the notion of a capacity of responsiveness with respect to them, bestows upon them an ontological status to which Gibbard wants to say they are simply not entitled. The onus of proof appears to rest with Railton; if Railton intends his notion of a capacity to be responsive to reasons to be a plausible one, it is incumbent upon him to demonstrate why normative properties, such as reasons, might be deserving of the kind of metaphysical status which the capacity appears to assume.

How might we go about demonstrating that a property, object, or relation is metaphysically robust? Prevailing trends in naturalistic epistemology stipulate that if metaphysical posits are to play a role in our relevant theories, then they must earn that role by doing explanatory work. Might we hold normative properties answerable to a similar criterion? If we thought that there were substantive epistemic dissimilarities between normative properties, whatever they might turn out to be, and those properties which naturalistic epistemology has, traditionally speaking, taken to fall within its purview, namely natural, specifically scientific, kinds, then we might be inclined to answer this question in the negative. It is a central tenet of Railton’s metaethical perspective, however, that no such dissimilarity exists.51 Those same standards of confirmation which we apply when the objects of our enquiry are scientific kinds ought to be applied, Railton believes, when the objects of our enquiry are normative kinds. Indeed, in this respect Railton’s perspective is constitutive of a much broader movement in metaethics, which seeks to unify normative, particularly ethical, and scientific knowledge under a single analytical framework.52 We gain an important insight into Railton’s position when we note that his advocacy for the application of the criteria of naturalistic epistemology to enquiry into normative phenomena takes place against the backdrop of unifying ambitions of precisely this kind.

How might one go about demonstrating that normative properties are capable of playing some substantial causal-explanatory function? With this question in mind let us turn

our attention to Railton’s broader metaethical position, the coordinates of which are, generally speaking, fixed by three claims. The first of these claims states of normative discourse that it plays an essentially descriptive function. Recall that according to Gibbard, in spite of a shared appearance, normative judgments differ with respect to function from non-normative judgments; while non-normative judgments function by describing (or purporting to describe) certain features of the world, normative judgments function by expressing (or purporting to express) states of mind. Railton rejects this division outright. We ought, Railton thinks, to take normative language at face value. This entails thinking of normative terms, such as ‘good’, ‘right’ and so on, as playing a function analogous to their non-normative counterparts, ‘green’, ‘round’ and so forth, that is as purporting to pick out some property or set of properties in the world.53 Likewise, argues Railton, normative judgments should be understood as being in the business of making substantive assertions which purport to describe some normative reality, and thus as truth-apt in precisely the same way that non-normative judgments are.

The second metaethical claim which fixes Railton’s position is that the properties which normative judgments purport to describe, or at least a subset of these properties, are instantiated, that is, that at least some normative judgments are true. Railton’s third claim concerns the nature of these properties. We began this section by noting Railton’s support for the assimilation of normative enquiry to scientific enquiry. A corollary of this is that we ought to think of normative properties on the model of natural properties. Indeed, Railton wants to say that normative properties just are natural properties. These three claims mark out Railton’s position as cognitivist, realist and naturalist, respectively.54

1. What normative properties might be

Let us provisionally accept Railton’s first claim and focus our attention on the remaining two. What might a normative natural property consist in? Consider what such a property might look like in the case of non-moral value, where an outcome has non-moral value for an individual just in case it best serves that individual’s interests. Railton wants to say that for each individual, A, there exists some state of affairs which has the property of being intrinsically non-morally good for A. Here, in summary, is his argument. Suppose A is given full information regarding their physical and psychological constitution and

53 In making this claim Railton does not wish to deny that normative language has, at the same time, a prescriptive function. Indeed, according to Railton one of the fundamental challenges a view such as his faces is in, “explaining how an essentially descriptive use of language could have the prescriptive force of value discourse.” Peter Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity”, in Social Philosophy and Policy, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Sept., 1989), p. 154
54 For a more comprehensive summary of Railton’s position see Railton, “Moral Realism”, pp. 164-165
environment. Suppose further that $A$’s instrumental rationality is optimal. Then $A$ becomes $A^+$. Suppose we ask $A^+$ what he would want his nonidealised self, $A$, to want were he, $A^+$, to find himself in $A$’s situation. The answer $A^+$ gives constitutes what Railton terms an objectified subjective interest, or an objective interest, of $A$. The notion of an objective interest yields necessary and sufficient conditions for non-moral goodness: “$X$ is non-morally good for $A$ if and only if $X$ would satisfy an objective interest of $A^+$”, which yields the same in turn for the notion of intrinsic non-moral goodness: “$X$ is intrinsically non-morally good for $A$ just in case $X$ is in $A$’s objective interest without reference to any other objective interest of $A$”. Railton wants to say that the term ‘non-morally good for $A$’ picks out those states of affairs which have the property of being intrinsically non-morally good for $A$.

2. Non-moral properties and causal-explanatory role: the wants/interests mechanism

The task before Railton is to demonstrate how the property of being non-morally good might be causally efficacious. In the case of standard natural properties, such a demonstration typically proceeds by showing the relevant property to play an explanatory role with respect to our observations, such that we are unable to satisfactorily account for those observations without positing the property. In other words, the causal efficacy of the property is secured by virtue of its being essential to our explanatory apparatus. Prima facie normative properties face difficulties in this connection. For instance, Gilbert Harman has argued that moral facts, properties and so on are “totally irrelevant” to explanations of our moral observations. These observations are explainable, Harman thinks, purely in terms of the relevant individual’s ‘psychological “set”’, that is, “the psychology or moral sensibility of the person making the moral observation”. The implications for Railton’s project are severe: if Harman’s charge of irrelevance can be extended to non-moral properties, and there is no reason to see why it cannot, then it would appear that such properties are redundant, not only to our non-moral observations but to a theory of non-moral discourse more generally.

Harman’s argument has not, however, gone uncriticised. Nicholas Sturgeon, for one, has argued that, contra Harman, moral properties are capable of playing a necessary

55 Railton, “Moral Realism”, p. 176
56 Ibid., p. 178
57 Full information analyses, such as Railton’s, have a venerable history which can be traced back at least to Richard Brandt’s influential work, A Theory of the Good and the Right. For criticisms of such analyses see: David Velleman, “Brandt’s Definition of "Good””, in The Philosophical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3 (Jul., 1988), pp. 353-371; David Sobel, “Full Information Accounts of Well-Being”, in Ethics, Vol. 104, No. 4 (Jul., 1994), pp. 784-810; and Connie Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives and Full Information A
59 Ibid., p. 6
explanatory role, “that many moral explanations appear to be good explanations, or components in good explanations …”\(^{60}\) Sturgeon cites a number of commonplace examples in support of his argument. For instance, it is generally held that the explanation for Hitler’s having done the things he did, ordering the ‘final solution’, and so on, lies primarily with his having been a morally depraved individual. In an explanation of this kind the property of moral depravity apparently plays a straightforward explanatory role.\(^ {61}\) Moreover, Sturgeon argues that the property plays this role necessarily, given the outcome that is being explained: it is part of our standard moral theory, Sturgeon contends, that if Hitler had not been morally depraved, then he would not have done the things he did.\(^ {62}\) Harman’s argument might hold if our standard moral theory was mistaken, but, argues Sturgeon, Harman gives us no independent reason to think that it is.\(^ {63}\)

If Sturgeon is correct, then the causal efficacy of moral properties might be demonstrated via their playing a causal role in our explanations. Railton thinks a demonstration of precisely this kind is possible in the case of non-moral value, where the relevant explanations are those addressing changes in patterns of desire formation. According to Railton, the property of being intrinsically non-morally good participates in processes which are efficacious with respect to our occurrent wants, or what Railton calls our subjective interests. One such process is the wants/interests mechanism, which, over time, adjusts our desires so that they are brought increasingly into accordance with our objective interests.

For example, consider the desire a young child might feel to stay awake on Christmas Eve, which, when acted upon, inevitably results in their being exhausted, grumpy and unable to enjoy themselves come Christmas Day. Given enough Christmases spent this way, it seems reasonable to expect that this desire will, however gradually, subside. In its place the child may very well develop a desire to get to bed early enough so that they might enjoy themselves the following day. In this case Railton wants to say that as the result of direct causal interaction with the property of non-moral goodness the child has altered his patterns


\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 68. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence”, in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 12 (1988), p. 445, has maintained that Sturgeon’s response fails to adequately address Harman’s skepticism. Sturgeon’s argument might show that moral assumptions are in particular cases explanatorily relevant to an outcome but it fails to show that such assumptions are explanatorily potent, where an assumption “is explanatorily impotent with respect to a certain fact, if the fact would have obtained and we could have explained it just as well, even if the assumption had not been invoked in the explanation (as opposed to: ‘even if the assumption had been false’).”

\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 71
of desire-formation so that they more closely approximate his objective interests. The explanations we are inclined to give for changes in the child’s behaviour, Railton thinks, implicitly acknowledge this causal interaction: ‘I only had to put him to bed once tonight before he went to sleep!’ ‘That’s because he realises he’ll feel better for it tomorrow.’ Thus, the wants/interests mechanism is significant for Railton’s broader project insofar as it apparently demonstrates the causal efficacy of non-moral properties by showing them to play a causal-explanatory role with respect to changes in patterns of desire formation. In so doing it testifies to the metaphysical robustness of non-moral properties and in this way promises to reconcile Railton’s theory of non-moral value with naturalistic epistemology.

3. How causal features of normative properties support a causal semantics and a theory of quasi-epistemic access

Arguments for the instantiation of normative properties, such as Railton’s, which proceed by seeking to demonstrate their causal efficacy, provide the basis for an account, first, of how the referent of a normative term might be fixed, and, second, of how epistemic, or, rather, quasi-epistemic, contact with the properties to which normative terms refer might be possible. Let me take each of these points in turn. With respect to reference fixing, the causal features of normative properties are utilised by causal semantic theories, which defer to our direct interaction with the relevant property, object, relation, and so on, in giving an explanation of how reference to the property etc. might be established. Causal theories represent alternatives to traditional descriptional semantic theories, which take the referent of a name or natural kind term to be fixed by the particular beliefs or descriptions which a speaker, or speakers, associates with that name or term. Causal theories reject this contention, and argue instead that the referent of a name or term is whatever property or set of properties stand in the appropriate causal relation to uses of that term. Words come to refer to a property by virtue of a causal chain:

In the idealised case, a group of speakers introduces a term such that what their term refers to is that bit of the environment … that explains what they found interesting and intended to pick out. Subsequent speakers borrow this term with the intention of referring to the same thing; their use of the term inherits reference to the same features of the environment via a causal-historical chain extending from their use of the term, through the original “dubbing ceremony,” to the relevant aspects of the environment.

One implication of thinking about reference in terms of causal relations is that the task of determining the referent of a term becomes principally a matter of empirical and historical enquiry. According to causal theories the term ‘water’ refers to the property of being H₂O just in case there are instantiated the right kind of causal relations between that property and our usage of the term. The question, however, of whether relations of this kind obtain is not something that can be settled *a priori*. Rather, we must look into the world and *see* if they obtain. In other words, if reference relations are essentially causal relations then reference is determinable *a posteriori*. Within the context of the present discussion the relevance of this point is that, assuming causal semantics are more or less correct, it is no objection to Railton’s theory that, for instance, the property of satisfying *A*’s objective interest, where an objective interest is defined in Railton’s terms, fails to satisfy descriptions which we associate with, and take to be definitional of, the term ‘non-morally good for *A*’, as it would be were descriptional accounts true. To show that the term ‘non-morally good’ tracks this property it will suffice to show that it is this property which is responsible for causally regulating our usage of that term.

The claim that reference is a matter of there existing causal connections of the appropriate kind between instances of a word’s use and its referent would simultaneously appear to have epistemic implications. For, as Richard Boyd argues, “reference is itself an epistemic notion and the sorts of causal connections which are relevant to reference are just those which are involved in the reliable regulation of belief.” 66 This symmetry between epistemic and referential considerations suggests the following necessary and sufficient conditions for reference: “a term *t* refers to a kind (property, relation, etc.) *k* just in case there exist causal mechanisms whose tendency is to bring it about, over time, that what is predicated of the term *t* will be approximately true of *k* … When relations of this sort obtain, we may think of the properties of *k* as regulating the use of *t* …” 67 A definition of reference of this kind, with epistemic criteria built-in, so to speak, constitutes a basis upon which to ground an understanding of how the causal features of normative properties might participate in mechanisms of reliable belief formation.

Crucially though, our capacity to track normative properties is not, on Railton’s account, limited to the regulative influence which these properties are able to exert with respect to our judgments and beliefs. Recall our discussion of the wants/interests mechanism in connection with non-moral value. The mechanism’s functioning, we observed, was responsible for adjustments in the child’s desires. What is striking is the extent to which this

66 Boyd, “How to Be a Moral Realist”, p. 195
67 Ibid.
functioning can occur independently of the child’s capacity for belief formation. At no stage need the child explicitly formulate the belief that getting a decent night’s sleep is in his interests. It might be that one Christmas Eve he finds that he simply cannot keep himself awake. The next day he is in a better mood, he has more energy and thus enjoys himself more. Suppose that as a result he comes to associate, again, not necessarily consciously associate, having a good night’s rest with enjoying the next day. Consequently, when Christmas Eve comes around the following year he may find himself less inclined to want to stay awake, even if, on some level, the belief perseveres that staying awake would, all things considered, be the thing to do. In this way, the fact that it is in the child’s interests to get a good night’s sleep might causally regulate his desires in spite of what he may judge or believe his interests to be.

Considerations such as these suggest that in addition to our being able to access normative properties through standard epistemic means, we have a capacity for what we might term quasi-epistemic access with respect to these properties, quasi-epistemic in the sense that it is securable without the mediation of our faculty for judgment or belief-formation. We want to say that the child's desires are directly causally interacting with the normative property of non-moral goodness. Insofar as desires are non-judgmental and non-conceptual the child is apparently accessing the property of non-moral goodness independently of his having deployed judgments or concepts. In spite of this, we can nevertheless think of this access as facilitating what we might tentatively call ‘learning’, insofar as the adjustments for which it is responsible ought to be thought of as bringing the child's behaviour, dispositions, and so on, into closer accord with some normative reality. The child, Railton wants to say, is not simply abandoning one set of desires in favour of another, but, rather, making progress towards what is non-morally good, by adopting those desires which more closely approximate his objective interests.

The wants/interests mechanism, insofar as it provides a sketch of the way in which a psychological state such as desire might, as the result of essentially quasi-epistemic mechanisms, track one’s objective interests, constitutes a model on the basis of which we can ground an understanding of how norms which bear no association to judgment or reasoning might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. Just as in the case of desire the contention is that these norms access reasons by virtue of their direct causal interaction with the relevant normative property, that is, that they access this property quasi-epistemically. By virtue of its detailing how norms might secure non-judgmental and non-conceptual access to normative properties, the notion of quasi-epistemic access is key to Railton's anti-intellectualism.
4. Reconsidering causal semantics for normative terms

Let us briefly take stock. Thus far in this chapter I have been concerned to bring to light the metaphysical, semantic and quasi-epistemic assumptions which undergird the contention at the centre of Railton’s anti-intellectualism that norms which bear no association to judgment might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. Throughout, I have sought to make clear the justifications which are offered on behalf of these assumptions. In the case of the metaphysical assumption, we noted that Railton appeals to the apparent causal-explanatory role which normative properties are capable of playing with respect to our explanations. The causal efficacy of normative properties is then used as ground upon which to establish an argument for, first, a causal-semantic theory with respect to normative terms, and, second, a theory of how epistemic and quasi-epistemic contact with normative properties might be possible. In the remainder of this chapter I wish to critically assess the semantic component of Railton’s account. I’ll argue that we have compelling reasons for finding this component untenable and thus for questioning the notion of quasi-epistemic access which it supports.

The principal thesis of causal theories of reference, to which the semantic component of Railton’s account makes appeal, is, we might recall, that the reference relation between term and property is secured by virtue of a causal chain linking the property with instances of the term’s deployment. Early presentations of causal theories focus solely on their application in connection with names and natural kind terms. Their application, in an unmodified form, to normative terms proceeds against the assumption that there are no relevant substantive differences between natural kind and normative terms, respectively, which might mitigate their applicability. This assumption has not been accepted unanimously. Many have argued that there are important prima facie differences, between, for instance, our deployment of normative and natural kind terms, which render the application of causal theories to normative terms problematic.

To get a sense of what these differences might be, let us begin by taking a step back and considering the connection which exists between the more general categories of the normative and the causal. Do these categories come apart in any substantive sense? It seems to be a guiding theme throughout Railton’s project that they do not. Indeed, we might recall the basic assumption from which this project proceeds: that normative enquiry is ‘of a piece’ with

scientific enquiry. Scientific enquiry might be fairly characterised as enquiry into the causal universe; its primary function is to bring to light those causal connections which explain observed phenomena. The theory which this enquiry generates, in the form of scientific postulates, is confirmed to the extent to which it demonstrates explanatory utility with respect to these phenomena. If scientific enquiry and normative enquiry are, indeed, of a piece, then, by parity of reasoning, the latter too must be similarly orientated towards the provision of causal explanations. Connectedly, what we might consider the outcome of this enquiry, viz. normative standards, must function explanatorily. This sequence of reasoning delivers the conclusion that the criteria a normative standard must meet in order to be justified are precisely those criteria by which a scientific postulate is confirmed. In so doing, it effectively assimilates the category of the normative to that of the causal.

Ought those criteria which are relevant to the confirmation of a scientific postulate to form the basis upon which we determine whether a particular normative standard is justified? This question is rarely addressed in the literature, which is both unfortunate and surprising, given the ambitiousness of the claim which is at stake. In his article “Explanation and Justification in Ethics” David Copp argues that they ought not. His argument is addressed to moral standards, but can, and should, I think, be applied to normative standards more generally. The thrust of Copp’s argument consists in the contention that explanatory utility is irrelevant to the justification of a moral standard or theory. A moral explanation could be genuine, in the sense of being empirically confirmed, Copp claims, and yet it remain an open question whether the associated moral standard is in fact justified. It could, for instance, be true that the explanation for Hitler’s doing the things he did, his ordering the genocide of the Jews, and so on, is that he was a morally corrupt individual. However, this would not suffice, Copp claims, to justify the moral standard by which we judge Hitler to be morally corrupt. For, its justification, and, indeed, the justification of any moral standard more generally, does not turn on the question of whether or not it is empirically confirmed.

Indeed, when we enquire into whether a particular moral standard is justified, we do not appear to be asking about that standard’s explanatory utility. Our enquiry seems to be directed elsewhere. We want to know whether that standard is one which we ought to observe. Copp is insisting, correctly in my view, that considerations of explanatory utility fail to settle this question. In so doing he locates a substantive and crucial dissimilarity between the modes of normative and scientific enquiry, and the categories of the normative and the causal more generally.

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69 David Copp, “Explanation and Justification in Ethics”, in Ethics, Vol. 100 (Jan., 1990), pp. 239, 243 and 247
An explanation for this dissimilarity can be given at the level of what Eric Gampel terms referential intent. When we deploy a natural kind term, ‘hot’, say, it is reasonable to suppose that our intent is a straightforward explanatory one; we intend through our usage of the term to pick out that property which is causally responsible for certain observable characteristics associated with the term ‘hot’. Suppose that after looking into the world we find that the property causally responsible for these characteristics is the property of having a relatively high mean molecular kinetic energy. Then, the fact that we intended to refer to the relevant causally efficacious property justifies our identifying this property as the referent of the term ‘hot’. With respect to natural kind terms more generally, then, we can say that the fact that property \( x \) plays a causal-explanatory role where observable characteristics associated with term \( y \) are concerned, suffices to justify our identifying \( x \) as the referent of \( y \) only because there exist intentions of the appropriate kind among ordinary speakers.

In the case of normative terms, however, these intentions are absent. Our intention in using moral terms, say, does not seem to be to pick out those properties which are efficacious with respect to observable features associated with those terms:

For instance, in telling you some act is wrong, I am not intending to refer to whatever property causes such things as the harming of person and disapproval. Nor am I, in most cases, trying to get you to see that the act will or could lead to harms or disapprovals. If I tell you an act is wrong, I am trying to indicate that you should disapprove of it, whether you do in fact do so or not.

That our intention when using ethical terms is not primarily one of designating some causal property is clearly evidenced, Gampel contends, by the fact that two people could agree that some act is causally responsible for an outcome or set of outcomes typically associated with right acts, and yet coherently disagree with respect to whether that act is in fact right. In the case of natural kind terms such disagreement appears bizarre; if I associate the observable characteristic, tendency to cause burns under certain conditions of exposure, with the term ‘hot’, and I know that a high molecular kinetic energy is causally responsible for this observation, then the question ‘I can see that \( x \) has a high molecular kinetic energy,

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71 Ibid., p. 197
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
but is $x$ hot?’ is closed, is in the sense that one cannot coherently ask the question without demonstrating that they do not understand the terms involved.

Gampel’s argument provides us with a reason to resist the application of causal theories to normative terms. Causal theories proceed against the assumption that our intent when deploying a term is to refer to that property which is causally responsible for a set of observable characteristics. If Gampel is correct, then this assumption is going to mean that causal theories deliver the wrong referent in the case of normative terms. For our intent in deploying a normative term, if it is to identify a property at all, is not to identify that property which is causally responsible for those observable characteristics in response to which we deployed the term, that is, that property which explains the term’s deployment, but, rather, that property which justifies it. In the case of normative terms, then, it is justificatory, rather than explanatory, role which is relevant to determining the referent.

That our objection to the application of causal theories to normative terms is grounded in our cashing out a perceived dissimilarity between normative and scientific enquiry in terms of speakers’ intentions might be thought to give the lie to that objection. After all, if causal theories are correct then speakers’ intentions are extraneous to reference fixing. For causal theories hold that a term refers to a property, object or relation, just in case there are causal connections of an appropriate kind linking that term and property. Crucially, these connections can instantiate a reference relation which differs from that which the speaker intends to instantiate by deploying the term. The relevance of this point within the context of the present discussion is that the fact that we do not intend to refer to a particular property when we deploy a normative term—in the present case that property which is causally efficacious with respect to certain observable characteristics associated with it—does not preclude that property from being the bona fide referent of that term. Consequently, Railton can agree that our referential intentions with respect to normative terms are as Gampel says they are, without thereby surrendering causal semantics.

If speakers’ intentions are indeed extraneous to reference fixing then our objection would appear to miss its mark. Yet there are compelling reasons to think that this is not the case, that intentions are essential in this respect, even given the approximate truth of causal theories. These reasons are brought most clearly to the fore in connection with questions concerning what we might call determinacy of reference and considerations which suggest that causal connections are insufficient to guarantee this determinacy in certain cases.
Consider, for example, what Devitt and Sterelny term the *qua-problem*. The problem arises out of the observation that for any natural kind object or property it is likely to be the case that there are multiple natural kind categories to which that object or property belongs. A European Honey Bee, for example, is also an insect, a non-vertebrate, and so on. In such cases we stand in need of some method which allows us to determine *qua* member of which category the object or property grounds the natural kind term which we use to pick it out. An examination of causal connections alone, it seems, cannot settle this question. For those connections which link the term to the object *qua* insect are precisely those same connections which link it *qua* non-vertebrate. Rather, it appears that if we are to fix the referent with any determinacy we must take into consideration the descriptions or the concepts under which the speaker thinks of the object and thus the speaker’s intention in deploying the relevant term.

This problem applies with equal force in the case of normative kinds. An action, for instance, can fall under multiple normative kind categories; it can be right and at the same time benevolent, just, and so on. And as before, an enquiry into causal connections is likely to leave unresolved the question ‘*Qua* member of which of these categories does the action ground the relevant term?’ Rather, it seems that, as before, we must be prepared to consult the speaker’s intentions if we are to avoid indeterminacy of reference. Thus, it appears that proponents of the application of causal theories to normative terms are caught in a bind: if they are unwilling to acknowledge speakers’ intentions as semantically relevant then they face difficulties securing determinacy of reference; if they do acknowledge their relevance, however, they must concede that causal connections deliver the wrong referent in the case of normative terms.

5. **Implications for the notion of quasi-epistemic access and Railton’s account of norm-guidance**

In § 4 we traced the connections which link the semantic and epistemic components of Railton’s metaethical position. Specifically, we observed that the notion of quasi-epistemic access is linked to Railton’s taking seriously Boyd’s contention that epistemic access generally is facilitated by precisely those causal connections which the causal theorist wants to say facilitates reference. If the relevant connections are indeed causal, then it is plausible to think that their efficacy is not confined to their regulating our judgments or belief states, but extends also to quasi-epistemic states such as desire. Thus, one of the principal assumptions underwriting the notion of quasi-epistemic access is that the application of causal semantics to normative terms is relatively unproblematic. By challenging this assumption, as

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74 Devitt and Sterelny, p. 91
we have done in the preceding section, we are effectively challenging the foundation upon which this notion is built. If causal connections deliver the wrong referent in the case of normative terms, then the notion of quasi-epistemic access loses its theoretical basis.

Indeed, by virtue of their bringing into question the notion of quasi-epistemic access, the problems which we have raised for the application of causal semantics to normative terms have implications for Railton’s anti-intellectualist analysis of norm-guidance more generally. As we saw in § 4, the notion of quasi-epistemic access is key to this analysis insofar as it details how norms which are not associated with judgment might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. Consequently, showing the notion of quasi-epistemic access to rest on shaky foundations destabilises Railton’s anti-intellectualism more broadly.

7. Summary

We began this chapter by asking about how Railton might vindicate the contention that norms which are disconnected from our judgmental capacities might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. First, we sketched a defence of Railton’s normative realism. This defence looks to establish the metaphysical robustness of normative properties by appealing to their apparent role in causal explanations. In so doing we noted that it supports, first, a semantic thesis, namely that the reference relation between a normative term and the corresponding property is a matter of there existing, between that term and property, causal connections of the appropriate kind, and, second, a quasi-epistemic thesis, namely that our direct causal interaction with the relevant normative property constitutes a kind of quasi-epistemic access with respect to that property. We noted that the notion of quasi-epistemic access is essential to Railton’s anti-intellectualism insofar as it details how norms which bear no association to our judgmental capacities might nevertheless establish a route to reasons.

In the second half of this chapter we raised some problems for the semantic component of Railton’s metaethical position and noted the implications for the notion of quasi-epistemic access and for Railton’s anti-intellectualism more generally. Pure causal theories which take the concept which a speaker associates with a normative or natural kind term to be extraneous to reference are, we observed, vulnerable to the qua-problem. Those which accept its relevance, however, must acknowledge that causal connections deliver the wrong referent in the case of normative terms. The reason, we noted, is that in these cases this concept includes a description of the referent as playing a justificatory, rather than simply an explanatory, role. We asked about the implications of this observation at the level of norms and saw that it gave us reason to think the notion of quasi-epistemic access, and, indeed, Railton’s account of
norm-guidance, problematic.

Chapter 4
Where to from here? Some prospects for intellectualism

In the preceding chapter we raised some problems at the metaethical level for Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance. In the present chapter I investigate ways in which the debate about how we ought to understand norm-guidance might be moved forward in light of these problems for Railton’s account. I begin by summarising the challenge which faces the proponent of anti-intellectualism. Following this, I turn my focus to intellectualism. I ask whether by deferring to a notion of implicit judgment, intellectualism might be better equipped to accommodate the relevant phenomena. From here I am led to a discussion of the notion of implicit judgment and the criteria which a judgment must satisfy to count as such, before revisiting cases which, towards the end of Chapter 2, we identified as causing problems for intellectualism. I conclude with some remarks on intellectualism and normativity.

1. Anti-intellectualist analyses of norm-guidance: prospects and challenges

That the application of causal semantics in the case of normative terms is problematic does not necessarily spell the end for anti-intellectualist analyses of norm-guidance, since it might always be possible for us to ground these analyses in an alternative semantic theory. The difficulties that present themselves in connection with this task are, however, sizeable. Any suitable alternative must satisfy at least two criteria: first, it must avoid the objection from indeterminacy which we raised against causal semantic theories; and, second, it must be capable of grounding the notion of quasi-epistemic access. Yet it is not immediately clear how these two constraints might be satisfied by a single semantic theory. In light of our discussion in the latter half of Chapter 3, it would seem that the most promising way for a
semantic theory to avoid the objection from indeterminacy is to acknowledge that the set of
descriptions which a speaker associates with a term is necessary to settle its referent. This
does not appear a genuine option for the anti-intellectualist, however, for in so doing one is
dissenting from the claim that causal connections alone are sufficient to settle reference and,
in light of our discussion regarding the connection between the semantic and epistemic
components of Railton’s metaethical positions, thereby from the notion of quasi-epistemic
access.

Working in the opposite direction, the notion of quasi-epistemic access seems to rely
for its plausibility on the approximate truth of semantic theories which emphasise the causal
efficacy of properties over speakers’ intentions. So long as the tracking relation is conceived
simply in terms of there existing causal connections of an appropriate kind then the claim that
this relation might be instantiated without the mediation of concepts or judgments, the claim,
in other words, that a speaker might access the relevant property quasi-epistemically, appears
plausible. Moreover, the generalised application of this model, for instance to the relation
between norms and reasons, seems relatively unproblematic. Yet as we have already
demonstrated, semantic theories of this kind appear unable to secure determinacy of
reference. Consequently, it is difficult to see how an alternative semantic theory might at
once avoid the objection from indeterminacy and function as a basis for a notion of quasi-
epistemic access.

I should clarify that in saying as much I do not claim to have demonstrated that any
attempt to satisfy these two constraints fails necessarily. Perhaps there is a way of securing
determinacy of reference without deferring to the descriptions which a speaker associates
with a term, for instance. Perhaps all that is required here is a more detailed specification of
the conditions under which causal connections facilitate reference. My concern has been to
raise some difficulties at the metaethical level for the anti-intellectualist model of how we
access normative properties with respect to which we appear presently to have no means of
resolving. Whilst ultimately these difficulties might not prove fatal, in the present context I
take them to be of sufficient magnitude to justify our considering alternatives.

2. Rethinking intellectualism

Returning to our discussion in Chapter 2, § 4, recall that our *prima facie* reason for
favouring Railton’s analysis of norm-guidance was that it appeared to more accurately
capture the relevant phenomena than did competing intellectualist analyses. In light of our
having identified problems for Railton’s analysis, one possible way forward is to enquire into
whether intellectualism might yield an analysis of this connection which fits more closely the relevant phenomena.

The primary obstacle in this respect is that intellectualism appears committed to there being a clear division between those norms which are capable of guiding action such that that action is also guided by reasons and those which are not. Since many of the cases we would like our theory to accommodate involve norms which fall on the wrong side of this division, clearly our proposed analysis must find some way of freeing itself from this commitment if it is to be competitive against Railton’s.

In Chapter 1 we traced the route that led Gibbard from anti-realism about normative properties to an analysis of norm-guidance which appeared to entail a division of precisely this kind. As an anti-realist, Gibbard rejects the contention that normative properties, such as the property of being a reason, are ever instantiated. Having a reason is, on Gibbard’s view, to be explained in terms of our judging ourselves to have a reason. On this view the norms which are relevant to reasons are precisely those which are relevant to our judgments about reasons, and these, according to Gibbard, are the norms which we accept.

Notice that this sequence of reasoning relies on a particular conception of what it is to make a normative judgment, viz. to perform an act which is essentially explicit. Yet we might dispute the claim that this conception holds for normative judgments tout court. Might not judgments be sometimes implicit? Certainly, the notion of an implicit judgment is one to which we regularly appeal when making sense of our own behaviour and the behaviour of others. Let us seek a clearer understanding of this notion by considering a recent and influential analysis of the related notion of implicit belief.

3. Implicit judgment

The analysis I have in mind is given by Mark Crimmins in his paper ‘Tacitness and Virtual Belief’. The thrust of Crimmins’ argument is that implicit or “tacit beliefs … are explicit beliefs … virtually, or in effect.”75 According to Crimmins, an agent, $A$, implicitly believes some proposition, $p$, just in case, with respect to $A$’s dispositions, it is relevantly as if $A$ has an explicit belief in $p$.76 The principal advantage of Crimmins’ analysis is that it builds into the notion of implicitness a degree of flexibility; precisely which cases will count as

76 Ibid., p. 249
cases as implicit judgment will depend crucially on the way in which one chooses to spell out being relevantly as if. Given that implicitness remains a contentious notion, we should prefer an account which resists defining it too rigidly.

In view of the affinity between belief and judgment, we might utilise Crimmins’ analysis as a basis from which to build a notion of implicit judgment. What criteria ought we to give for being relevantly as if in this connection? There are, roughly speaking, three sets of dispositions which one could think are pertinent here: dispositions towards avowal—with respect to what an agent is disposed to say, is it as if they explicitly judged that \( p \)—; reasoning dispositions—with respect to how an agent is disposed to reason, is it as if they explicitly judged that \( p \)—; and dispositions towards action—with respect to what an agent is disposed to do, is it as if they explicitly judged that \( p \). As a preliminary formulation of a criterion for implicit judgment we might say: it is relevantly as if an agent explicitly judged that \( p \) if and only if it is as if they have explicitly judged that \( p \) with respect to all three sets of dispositions. Giving this criterion of the notion would significantly restrict the range of cases to which it has application. To get a sense of the kind of cases it would restrict it to, consider the following.

**Saskia:** More often than not, Saskia will cover her mouth with her hand when she yawns in public. Her doing so is never the consequence of any explicit chain of reasoning, but, rather, something she does without giving much thought to at all. It would be a mistake, however, to think that Saskia’s behaviour is mere habit. For on those occasions when she yawns and does not cover her mouth she is inclined to manifest certain behaviour: she feels uncomfortable, even when around people she doesn’t know, and has the need to justify her actions, to others, “I’m sorry! I didn’t get much sleep last night!” as well as to herself. Yet that she reacts to omission in this way is not the only evidence of a norm’s guiding presence. For instance, when Saskia sees someone yawn without covering their mouth she is inclined to form a view of that person as impolite or ill-mannered, again, not as the product of any conscious or deliberative process, but, rather, simply as a matter of course.

Should our explanation of Saskia’s disposition defer to Saskia’s making some suitably specified normative judgment, the judgment that one ought to cover their mouth when yawning in public, for instance?\(^{77}\) If we accept Crimmins’ analysis of implicitness then it

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\(^{77}\) There is debate about how exactly we should understand the relation between the notion of reasons and that of ought, about whether having *a* reason to do *x* is sufficient to make it the case that one ought to do *x*, for instance. It is reasonable, however, to assume some interdependence. After all, if it is true that one ought to do *x* then, presumably, that is because one has *some* reason to do *x*. Given this.
seems that we are justified in attributing a judgment of this sort to Saskia, albeit as implicit. For with respect to Saskia’s dispositions towards action—covering her mouth when she yawns—, her dispositions towards reasoning—reaching conclusions of a particular kind about people who do not cover their mouths when they yawn—, and her dispositions towards avowal—her wanting to justify her actions with “I’m sorry! I didn’t get much sleep last night!”—it is as if Saskia has made a judgment of this sort explicitly.

An analysis of implicit judgment as being virtually explicit seems able to accommodate Saskia’s case more or less straightforwardly by virtue of the fact that with respect to all three sets of relevant dispositions, action, reasoning and avowal, it is as if Saskia has made the relevant judgment explicitly. Yet I suggest that the range of this analysis may extend beyond cases with respect to which this fact holds. Consider, for instance, Frank.

**Frank:** Growing up in the 50’s Frank was exposed to a relatively conservative set of norms about how men and women ought to relate to one another. As the result of his deeply internalising these norms Frank was disposed to make judgments of a certain kind, for instance, the judgment that when a man and a woman are out together, for a meal, say, it is the man who ought to pay. When Frank first started dating at 18, at a time when he was still navigating his way through a precarious and complex array of social mores and conventions, this judgment was more or less explicit in Frank’s thinking. For instance, on the rare occasion that his date offered to take care of the bill, Frank usually declined, asking her, “What sort of date would this be if I made you pay?” As gradually he grew more and more familiar with these mores and conventions, however, the judgment took on a decidedly implicit character. For instance, when he and his wife-to-be, Susan, first started dating in the 60’s, it was by that time more or less assumed, by Susan as much as by Frank, that when out together for a meal, Frank, as the man, would, and, indeed, ought, to pay. Although this judgment was no longer explicit in Frank’s thinking, with respect to Frank’s dispositions towards action, his actually paying, as well as his dispositions towards avowal and reasoning, it was as if it was.

As the years passed, however, and people started to rethink traditional conceptions of how women and men ought to relate to one another, Frank began to question the norms which apparently underwrote this practice. As Frank strived to distance himself from what, as a progressive, he acknowledged were outdated and patriarchal values, he began to think differently about what was expected of him when he and Susan were out for a meal.

interdependence, it is plausible to assume that judgments about what one ought to do, my focus here, bear some connection to judgments about what one has reason to do.
Consequently, he is mildly surprised when even now he finds himself with a strong desire to pay in these circumstances. That there is more to this desire than simply wanting to treat his wife, say, is signalled by the fact that he feels intense discomfort on any occasion when he fails to pay, regardless of whether Susan feels as though she has been treated or not. The justification which Frank gives for his continuing to pay, both to himself and to Susan, no longer appeals to a judgment that he ought to, however. Instead, he is inclined to justify it in some other way, by telling Susan that the next one is on her, for instance.

The integral question for the intellectualist is whether Frank’s response, his desire to pay and the discomfort he feels on those occasions when he does not, is to be traced back to his implicitly judging that when a man and a woman go out for a meal the man ought to pay. A reason to think that it is not is that unlike in Saskia’s case the requisite as-if-ness for our positing this judgment as implicit only holds with respect to Frank’s dispositions towards action; if a judgment of this kind does indeed persist implicitly then it is, for all intents and purposes, disconnected from Frank’s dispositions towards reasoning and avowal. Yet we ought also to take into consideration the fact that historically the judgment has occupied a certain role in Frank’s psychology. We noted that as a youth of 18, and, it is reasonable to expect, for some time before that, the judgment was explicit in Frank’s thinking. Over time, however, the judgment took on an implicit character, albeit in what we might call a full-blooded sense: the requisite as-if-ness for our positing it as implicit held across all three sets of relevant dispositions. That the judgment has this lineage, that it was for a period of time explicit in Frank’s thinking and then implicit in the full-blooded sense, makes it reasonable to suppose that Frank’s response is more than, for instance, a brute emotional reaction, something which Frank does out of fear of losing face, for example. The question, however, is whether this lineage gives us sufficient reason to posit the judgment as implicit in Frank’s present psychology.

Certainly, the claim that normative precepts might be re-activated only with respect to an isolated domain of dispositions ought not to be surprising given the multilayered and often conflictive nature of the ongoing process which is our normative education. Patterns of normative thinking which were once hegemonic frequently resurface, despite one’s best intentions. Given that these patterns are often at odds with the norms and values to which one has come to cleave, it is not surprising that, whilst their influence may be felt keenly at the level of action, they should remain more or less alienated from the individual qua deliberative agent.
I will not argue here that the fact that historically Frank’s response bore the explicit and implicit connections to the judgment in question that it did shows decisively that this judgment persists implicitly in Frank’s present psychology, although certainly, one possible way forward for the intellectualist is to work at convincing us that it does. Suffice it to say that Frank’s case is unclear in the sense that it does not seem plausible to say conclusively that Frank’s response is disconnected entirely from his judgmental capacities.

4. Cases Revisited

What I have sought to do in the preceding section is to explore some possible ways forward for an intellectualism which appeals to the notion of implicit judgment were our interpretation of that notion to be based on Crimmins’ analysis of tacit belief. Let us continue our exploration by asking about how deference to the notion might affect intellectualism’s capacity to accommodate two reverse-akrasia cases which earlier, in Chapter 2, § 3 and 4, we identified as causing problems for it. The first of these cases features Ed, who, we might recall, recently sought out a new beginning as a member of a strict religious community. Despite believing the community’s punishment practices justified, Ed cannot bring himself to take an active role in their implementation as is required of him. We noted that as a child, Ed’s parents taught that punishment ought to be respectful and administered in private. These teachings are at odds with the community’s methods, which include public shunning, shaming, and so on. Although as an adult Ed has come to roundly reject his parents’ norms for punishment, it is clear that, with respect to his inability to participate wholeheartedly in the community’s practices, for instance, they nevertheless continue to exert a guiding influence.

Intuitively, we want to say that Ed’s finding himself unable to participate in the community’s practices is a consequence of his accessing justificatory reasons. Yet intellectualism appears unable to vindicate this intuition. Insofar as the norms guiding Ed’s behaviour have him in their grip, and consequently, are associated with a psychological attitude which presumably entails neither his making a judgment of the relevant kind, nor the deployment of the relevant normative concepts, intellectualism appears committed to rejecting outright the possibility that Ed’s behaviour could be reason-guided in this way. Railton, meanwhile, is not so committed. He has a story to tell as to how the norms which guide Ed might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. As we saw in Chapter 3, this story defers to causal connections which are capable of linking the relevant norms with instantiated normative properties. Insofar as these connections are capable of operating without the mediation of Ed’s belief states, his capacity for judgment, and so on, property and norm can
be linked in spite of the latter’s not being associated with an attitude entailing a judgment. In this way anti-intellectualism proposes to honour those intuitions which we have about Ed’s situation.

Perhaps, however, we ought not to discount so quickly the possibility that Ed’s response is the consequence of his making an implicit judgment, say, to the effect that one ought not to punish individuals through practices which are publicly humiliating, degrading, and so on. There appear to be a number of similarities between Ed’s case and the case of Frank. As in Frank’s case the requisite *as-if-ness* for our positing the relevant judgment as implicit fails to obtain with respect to Ed’s dispositions towards reasoning and avowal; Ed, recall, honestly believes the community’s practices justified. Given what we know about Ed’s upbringing, however, the norms for punishment which he was taught by his parents, and so on, it is reasonable to suppose that this judgment once bore strong explicit and implicit connections to these three sets of dispositions. Now, as we noted earlier in connection with Frank, this fact ought not to be taken as conclusive evidence that the judgment persists implicitly in Ed’s present psychology. Yet the intellectualist may very well appeal to this fact to motivate the argument that it is not clear that Ed is accessing justificatory reasons by means of non-conceptual and non-judgmental processes alone, as Railton is apparently suggesting that he is.

Might deference to the notion of implicit judgment have similar implications with respect to the second of our two cases, the case of Huckleberry Finn? Recall the way in which this case is set up. Huckleberry, having formed a friendship with Jim, an escaped slave, finds himself caught in a bind. He knows that assisting a slave to escape amounts to stealing and he does not wish to steal. Yet he also believes that one ought not to betray one’s friends. After giving the matter some thought he reckons that, given his situation, stealing would be a worse thing than betraying Jim, and so he decides that the thing to do is to turn Jim in. When the occasion presents itself, however, Huckleberry finds that he simply cannot bring himself to do so.

As in Ed’s case, our intuition is to say that Huckleberry’s not turning Jim in is the result of his accessing justificatory reasons. Yet intellectualism faces precisely the same problems accounting for this intuition as it did in Ed’s case: in not betraying Jim, Huckleberry acts on the basis of norms which he does not accept nor endorse as having most weight in his circumstances, norms which as such are not associated with any identifiable judgment. Can we say that Huckleberry’s failing to turn Jim in is the consequence of his making an implicit normative judgment, say to the effect that, roughly, one ought not to betray one’s friends,
even in cases where one’s friend is a slave, where the benefit in betrayal is absolving oneself from a charge of stealing? Again, with respect to Huckleberry’s dispositions towards reasoning and avowal, we do not seem justified in doing so; only with respect to Huckleberry’s dispositions towards action, his actually failing to turn Jim in, does the requisite as-if-ness hold. The more serious problem for the intellectualist in this case is, however, that unlike in the case of Frank and Ed, it is unlikely, given what we know about Huckleberry’s life up to this point, the prevalence of certain attitudes towards slavery at that time, and so on, that there was a period in Huckleberry’s life during which time the judgment was explicit or full-bloodedly implicit. The significance of this is that the intellectualist cannot dispute the anti-intellectualist’s claim that Huckleberry accesses reasons by means of essentially non-conceptual processes on the basis that, historically, the response which we are wanting to explain, Huckleberry’s failing to Jim in, was a consequence of Huckleberry’s making an explicit or full-bloodedly implicit judgment of the relevant kind.

A more plausible explanation for this response is that as a consequence of their spending time together Huckleberry comes to see Jim no longer simply as a slave but as a person, and consequently as deserving of a certain kind of respect. When the opportunity to turn Jim in presents itself this recognition of Jim’s personhood stands as a barrier, albeit a largely unconscious one, to Huckleberry’s betraying him. The anti-intellectualist might like to say that Huckleberry’s coming to this awareness and, moreover, its being the reason for his failing to turn Jim in, can be explained purely in terms of non-conceptual processes, as the result of Huckleberry’s direct causal interaction with Jim’s humanness, for instance. Yet perhaps this is too hasty a conclusion to reach. True, Huckleberry’s recognition of Jim’s personhood does not manifest itself as an explicit belief, yet presumably it does involve, at some level at least, Huckleberry’s applying particular normative concepts, the concept of a person, for example, the concept of respect, and so on. Moreover, it is plausible to think that if Huckleberry does indeed apply these concepts then it is as constituents in implicit normative judgments, the judgment that one ought to show a certain kind of respect to fellow persons, for instance. Suffice it to say that explaining Huckleberry’s failing to turn Jim in as a consequence of his coming to recognise Jim as a person does not seem to exclude the possibility that implicit judgments or the implicit deployment of concepts might also play some role in an explanation of Huckleberry’s behaviour.

In light of this discussion it is clear that the central task for the intellectualist is to determine under what circumstances it makes sense to posit a judgment as implicit. I have suggested that the history of the judgment within the agent’s past psychology is a consideration which will bear on this question. By appealing to this history it seems that the
intellectualist can show certain cases to be more complex and difficult than the anti-intellectualist makes out. Whilst ultimately it may be beyond the capability of the intellectualist to demonstrate the presence of an implicit judgment in all of these cases, they can at least press the anti-intellectualist to say more about why we should think that the agent is accessing reasons by means of non-conceptual and non-judgmental processes alone.

5. Intellectualism and normativity: concluding remarks

In Chapter 2, § 5 we noted the implications of our favouring Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance for a preferred conception of normativity. Taking a capacity for judgment to constitute a necessary condition for our being sensitive to normative phenomena, as prevailing intellectualist conceptions generally do, seemed to exclude certain prima facie cases of reason-guidance. In Ed’s and Huckleberry’s cases, for instance, we wanted to say that the imperativeness to conform their actions to guiding reasons manifested itself through apparently non-judgmental mechanisms. More generally, their sensitivity to normatively salient features of their situation appeared not to be concentrated in their judgmental “core” but, rather, diffused more broadly throughout the conscious and unconscious aspects of their psyches. The significance of our discussion in the preceding section is that it suggests that by appealing to the notion of implicit judgment the intellectualist might be able to agree that our normative sensitivity is more diffuse than typical intellectualist conceptions are prepared to recognise without forgoing entirely the thought that this broadened sensitivity might, in a range of cases at least, by facilitated by the deployment of normative judgments and concepts.

6. Summary

Our concern in the present chapter has been to investigate ways in which the debate about how we ought to understand norm-guidance might be moved forward in light of the problems which we raised for Railton’s analysis in Chapter 3. We began by summarising the challenge which faces the proponent of anti-intellectualism before moving on to consider the prospects for intellectualism. We indicated some ways in which deference to the notion of implicit judgment might assist intellectualism to more accurately accommodate our intuitions about relevant cases. We concluded by discussing some of the positive implications of this for intellectualist conceptions of normativity.
Conclusion

The principal aim of this study has been to assess competing intellectualist and anti-intellectualist accounts of normativity at the level of their respective positions regarding norm-guidance, that is, their respective analyses of the conditions under which a norm can be said to guide action such that that action is also guided by reasons. As part of this assessment I have sought to elucidate the metaethical assumptions about normative discourse, reasons and our epistemic access to them, which underwrite these positions respectively.

In Chapter 1 our focus was Allan Gibbard’s intellectualist account of norm-guidance. We saw that on Gibbard's expressivistic analysis of normative discourse having a reason is to be explained in terms of judging oneself to have a reason, where judging oneself to have a reason is to perform an essentially expressive act. On this analysis the norms which are relevant to reason-guided action are precisely those norms which are relevant to our judgments about reasons and our normative discourse more generally, namely the norms which we accept. We concluded this chapter by summarising how Gibbard's expressivism supports his intellectualism: since, as an expressivist, Gibbard denies that normative properties are instantiated there are no properties which might be tracked by norms which do not bear the appropriate connection to judgment and deliberation.

In Chapter 2 we considered an alternative to Gibbard's analysis, namely Peter Railton’s anti-intellectualist account of norm-guidance. According to Railton, the central intellectualist claim, namely, that only a privileged subset of norms are capable of guiding action such that that action is also guided by reasons, yields an overly restrictive account of norm-guidance. On Railton’s view, a range of norms, including those which bear no discernible association to judgment or deliberation, can facilitate reason-guided action. We examined the assumptions about rationality and agency which underwrite this broadened conception of the connection between guidance by norms and guidance by reasons. We saw that for Railton rationality consists not solely in the exercise of reasoning and deliberation but, rather, in a capacity to be
aptly responsive to reasons. We concluded this chapter by noting a prima facie reason for our favouring Railton’s account of norm-guidance; it appeared better able to accommodate the relevant phenomena.

In the first half of Chapter 3 we examined the metaethical assumptions which underwrite Railton’s broadened conception of norm-guidance. Specifically, we were interested in how these assumptions might vindicate Railton’s contention that norms which bear no association to judgment or deliberation might nevertheless establish a route to reasons. We began by acquainting ourselves with the metaphysical component of Railton’s metaethical position and his normative realism. We then noted that, insofar as it seeks to establish the metaphysical robustness of normative properties by appealing to their apparent causal efficacy, this component supports, first, a semantic thesis, namely that the reference relation between a normative term and the corresponding property is a matter of there existing, between that term and property, causal connections of the appropriate kind, and, second, an epistemic or, rather, quasi-epistemic thesis, namely that our direct causal interaction with the relevant normative property constitutes a kind of quasi-epistemic access with respect to that property. We noted that this notion of quasi-epistemic access is key to Railton’s anti-intellectualism insofar as it details how norms which are essentially disconnected from judgment and deliberation might nevertheless establish a route to reasons.

In the second half of chapter 3 we raised an objection to the semantic component of Railton’s account. Our objection was that deference to causal connections delivers the explanatory rather than the justificatory property, and thus the wrong referent in the case of normative terms. We concluded by noting this objection’s implications for the epistemic component of Railton’s analysis and, specifically, the notion of quasi-epistemic access. We saw that it gave us reason to find this notion untenable and, consequently, Railton’s anti-intellectualism more generally, problematic.

In Chapter 4 we considered how the debate about norm-guidance might be moved forward in light of this objection to Railton’s anti-intellectualist account, an account which, in Chapter 2, we noted we had a prima facie reason for favouring. To this end we considered the principal prospects and challenges which confront the anti-intellectualist and intellectualist respectively. We noted that for the anti-intellectualist the challenge is essentially that of grounding the central notion of quasi-epistemic access in an alternative to causal semantic theories. We considered some of the problems which present themselves in connection with this task. With respect to intellectualism, meanwhile, we explored whether, through appeal to the notion of implicit judgment, intellectualists might develop an account of
norm-guidance which is better able to accommodate more of the relevant phenomena. Our exploration of this possibility was tentative but yielded some \textit{prima facie} positive results, results upon which future intellectualist accounts of norm-guidance might look to build.

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