HELEN LONGINO

Circles of Reason: Some Feminist Reflections on Reason and Rationality[1]

Rationality and reason are topics so fraught for feminists that any useful reflection on them requires some prior exploration of the difficulties they have caused. One of those difficulties for feminists and, I suspect, for others in the margins of modernity, is the rhetoric of reason – the ways reason is bandied about as a qualification differentially bestowed on different types of person. Rhetorically, it functions in different ways depending on whether it is being denied or affirmed. In this paper, I want to explore these rhetorics of reason as they are considered in the work of two feminist philosophers. I shall draw on their work for some suggestions about how to think about rationality, and begin to use those suggestions to develop a constructive account that withstands the rhetorical temptations.

I

Philosopher Michèle LeDoeuff, in her recently translated, *The Sex of Knowing* (LeDoeuff 2003), takes note of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's somewhat bimodal views regarding rationality. In his *Letter to D'Alembert*, text and the accompanying notes offer accounts quite at variance with each other. In the notes, LeDoeuff finds a complex and open view of reason, quoting Rousseau: "human reason has no well-determined common measure and … it is unjust for any man to give his own as the rule to that of others. Let us suppose good faith, without which all disputation is only cackle. Up to a certain point there are common principles, a common evidence, and in addition each has his own reason which determines him. Thus this sentiment does not lead to skepticism; but also since the general limits of reason are not fixed and no one can inspect another's, here, with one stroke, the proud dogmatist is stopped." (Rousseau (1984), quoted in LeDoeuff, p. 174)

There are some sticky points in these remarks and in others in the same vein in the notes. One wants to know the extent of the common principles, what it is for one's own reason to determine one, what reasons could be offered for the principles he affirms. But LeDoeuff's point is that Rousseau's vision is an expansive one, of a reason that is open, that is not exhausted by a set of rules, that accommodates diversity, that incorporates dialogue and criticism. Surely a promising vision to explore and elaborate. But this wouldn't be Rousseau without a catch, and LeDoeuff is on to him, drawing her reader's attention to what he says in the text. Here he extolls the men's clubs of Geneva as the venues of True Reason, largely because here the men are "exempted from having to lower their ideas to the range of women." So the best exemplar of Reason is a closed society, best just because it is closed, restricted to men who are Genevan citizens. This reason flourishes in closed circles, closed both in terms of membership and in terms of the principles that might constitute reason. Apparently, there is a common measure to which some fail to measure up.

LeDoeuff's exhibition of Rousseau's duplicity helps us see the historical baggage the concepts of reason and/or rationality carry – at one and the same time designators of a kind of capacity, thought to be a human universal, *and* specification of rules for the proper exercise of that capacity. The specification of rules or status inevitably closes down what and who will count as rational. It disqualifies as possessors of the capacity those who don't or are presumed not to conform. Citizenship, male, of course, whether in Athens or Geneva, has often functioned as a criterion of performance according to the rules, enabling those within the circle to dismiss those outside, heedless of their protests. Twenty years ago, historian of philosophy Genevieve Lloyd published a stunning short book, *The Man of Reason*, arguing that in Western philosophy, reason and masculinity have remained metaphorically associated with each other through multiple changes in the understanding of each (Lloyd 1984). This association is part of a conceptual orientation that includes linking womanhood with unreason and unreason with emotions, or with unruly or base emotions, or with the body, or with materiality, in general, with whatever characteristic is selected for abjection. Investigation of philosophical systems operative in most historical periods reveals pairs of contrasts that taken together systematically elevate men and masculinity and debase women and femininity. While these conceptual categories only imperfectly fit actual human beings, their effects are to support the subordination and disempowerment of women. No wonder (some) feminists have reacted by celebrating emotion and subjectivity, and rejecting rationality and objectivity. As LeDoeuff emphasizes, to do so without questioning what we mean by these terms is, in the end, however, to collude with our cognitive subordination.

A certain amount of feminist effort has gone into rethinking rationality. Feminist philosophers of science have been especially eager to articulate alternatives to the masculinist conceptions identified by LeDoeuff and Lloyd. For the most part, their effort has involved showing how scientific judgment incorporates values. These philosophers differ among themselves as to which values are or should be so incorporated, and how or at what stage of scientific inquiry they play a role (Rooney 1992; Nelson 2001; Kourany 2003; Anderson 2004; Nelson and Wylie n.d.; Wylie 2004; Longino1990, 2005). But scientific *reasoning* remains a somewhat abstract concept in this work (as it has been for mainstream philosophy of science). And I'm not sure the demonstration of the role values (or decision vectors, to use a phrase of Miriam Solomon's (Solomon 2002)) play in scientific decision making tells us much about reason and rationality. In addition, allowing different values in, as feminists have advocated, raises the spectre of multiple exclusive circles.

Let me use my own work as an example. I've argued for a conception of knowledge that involves four conditions: venues, uptake, public standards, and equality of intellectual authority (Longino 1990). This conception requires only that the standards of criticism be public – and hence open to contestation and change – not that there be some set of standards that all communities must share in order that their cognitive efforts count as knowledge or their discursive interactions be deemed rational. Does this account of standards mean that multiple communities, each observing its own standards, can produce bodies of knowledge in contradiction with each other? The idea of knowledge as related to truth seems to give way to multiple closed circles of reason, each heedless of potential inconsistency with others. I try to avoid this particular impasse both by articulating the general conditions alluded to above and by advocating pluralism, but this stratagem is often perceived as only delaying the inevitable. And while it challenges the idea that rationality produces a single account of the natural world, the account does not really say much about reason and rationality themselves.

II

In hopes of advancing further, then, I propose to approach the rhetoric of reason from a slightly different angle by thinking with the nicely clear essay by English philosopher, Miranda Fricker, "Feminism in Epistemology: Pluralism without Postmodernism" (Fricker 2000). Where LeDoeuff considers Rousseau's 18th century paean to Reason, Fricker's starting point is the 20th century "postmodernist challenge" to reason. She takes this challenge seriously, accepting that there is something of a crisis of reason, which manifests itself in a widespread distrust of modernity and a repudiation of what are thought of as the rationalist dreams of the Enlightenment. As I understand it, the crisis is induced by observation of the susceptibility of rational discourse (in the form of social, political, and scientific theories) to the corrosive effects of deconstructive analysis. It is also induced by reflection on the "dark side" of modernity: the industrialization of forms of human slaughter, exemplified in so many ways in the wars of the last century, the elimination of entire peoples in the names of various ideals of ethnic purity, the possibility of nuclear annihilation, human-caused climate change. And if it seems hyperbolic to blame reason for these ills, one might still see a crisis in the incapacity of reason to derail these destructive projects. That crisis is made here suggests the disappointment of great expectations. This charge of disillusion with a mistaken ideal is one frequently made against postmodernists, but it tends to discourage further investigation into the postmodernist's worry. Fricker, instead, seeks to repudiate both typical postmodernist rejections of reason and purported solutions of the crisis by thinking through them, not against them.

Were the postmodernist theorist to rest with a rejection of reason, further discourse would stop. Postmodernist theorists, however, are, for the most part, also interested in articulating a critique of society, and so need some kind of scaffold that stops short of the discursive excesses they repudiate. Their solutions tend to localize, invoking situated or partial knowledge (in the manner of Donna Haraway (1986)) or nomadism (in the manner of Gilles Deleuze or Rosi Braidotti (1994). Here again the metaphor of 'circles' comes to mind. The situated, nomadic, solutions are ones that envisage non-intersecting, autonomous, circles of reason, local sets of standards binding on members only so long as they agree to be bound by them and that do not bind them to any others.[2] As Fricker notes, these solutions disempower the critical discourse they seem intended to preserve: if those who support slavery or gender discrimination are members of communities bound by different rules than those who condemn exploitation or discrimination, then that condemnation will bounce harmlessly off the backs of the exploiters or discriminators. What good is reason if it has no force? These reservations lead Fricker to wonder about the *authority* of critical thoughts one may voice. Fricker's wonder here led me to wonder in turn in what such authority might consist. What is its reach? Over what topics and upon whose doxastic practices does it extend? Rather than answer these questions, Fricker continues the investigation of the postmodernist's rejectionism.

What the postmodernist and the feminist resist is the idea that there is a template of rationality in which all discourses fit, a template that dissolves the barriers of locality, a universal language into which all statements from local contexts can be translated and brought into logical relations with each other. Such a template or universal language would trump efforts based on local standards to evade criticism of unjust practices, but it would also impose a straightjacket of uniformity disallowing the diversity produced by differently situated perspectives. One person's rationality, then, is another's tyranny.

To move beyond what seems a stalemate, Fricker turns to Michel Foucault's view about power and discourse. "Relations of power", Foucault says in *The History of Sexuality*, "are not to be understood as a force exterior to social processes [in which he includes both material, economic processes and discursive processes], but as immanent in them; they are both the effects of divisions, inequalities, and disequilibria in [these processes] and the internal conditions of those differentiations … relations of power have a directly productive role." (Foucault (1980), quoted in Fricker 2000). What is one to make of such statements? Is power political power, or the capacity to act? If political, is it the ability of a person or group to dominate others or the ability to have an effect on them? In many readings of Foucault, the power immanent in discursive processes is taken to mean political power and the imbrication of knowledge and power make of the invocation of reason and rationality an exercise in domination. Reason is authoritarian, not authoritative. (Think of such notions as the tyranny of reason, the violence of reason, the prisonhouse of language, etc., which sprinkle contemporary denunciations of (classical? Western?) rationality). It is always dangerous to pronounce on what Foucault might or might not have meant. But, it is not clear that Foucault meant his power to be equivalent to the political power from which one seeks liberation. 1) He himself is at pains to distinguish his general concept of power from coercion or political domination (think of 'biopower' and his insistence on the productive and capillary nature of power). And 2) within any system, both power as the capacity of anything to act or move *and* differentiation are conditions of change; without them a system remains in a condition of static equilibrium. Is it possible to have situations of different or unequal power without coercion or domination? Is this just a liberal fantasy?

Whatever the answer to that question, Fricker clearly understands power relations here not just as political, but as relations of domination, for she contrasts the Foucaultian view of rational discourse with a conception attributed to Kant via Onora O'Neill. Rational discourse, in this conception, is possible in, nay, requires, situations in which the non-suppression of critical thought is secured by an *absence* of power. If Foucault is right about the immanence of power relations, she says, then there is no such discursive situation. I repeat my misgivings concerning this reading of Foucault here, and think there's some equivocation in this argument, but, if so, Fricker is not alone. Power has acquired an unsavory reputation in contemporary times. On the other hand, I recognize this impasse, for it confronts my own claims for the role of equality of intellectual authority in the legitimation of knowledge claims. Critics say that this is unattainable and its assertion a vehicle for covert exercises of dominating power. Unattainable? Perhaps so in the political world we inhabit now, but is this a contingent fact or a necessary feature of social organization? And, as Fricker asks, what does the postmodern critic propose instead? The request for an alternative, with its tacit presupposition that the debate between the postmodernist and her/his interlocutor could be used as an example, is sometimes a way of calling the postmodernist's bluff, of showing that s/he is as responsive as the speaker to the constraints of reason. But like the accusation of hyperbolic expectations, this accusation of bad faith silences instead of facilitating discourse.

Fricker, for her part, continues with the examination of the postmodernist's hesitations, locating in the matter of power the crux of the postmodern malaise vis à vis reason. It is a ‘"despair of the possibility of distinguishing authoritative from authoritarian uses of reason." In the face of the despair, the postmodernist counsels irony, nomadism, acceptance of partiality, but as Fricker says, "If the reasoner is a discursive authoritarian who trades in a kind of terror, then the ironic and nomadic strategies merely add cynicism and capriciousness to the list of her vices." What does Fricker counsel? The problem of reason as per the postmodern malaise should not be seen as a Kantian foundational problem about rationality, but as a first order issue about the ethics of discursive practice. What she means by this is that we should not see worries about the tyranny of reason as worries about the very nature of rationality. Such worries are better understood as worries about how to perform rationally, participate in a discursive community in a way that is neither authoritarian nor coweringly submissive.[3]

And about this discursive practice or rational performance, Fricker says first, that it must be possible to point to non-authoritarian practices in order for the charge of authoritarianism to stick. It's useless to say *all* discourse or *all* rational discourse is authoritarian because to do so deprives one of the necessary contrast class. The same holds for reason or rationality. What could such a charge mean? What is the non-authoritarian contrast against whose background the charge is made? Secondly, she says, we must use the distinction between authoritative and authoritarian to bring to light the first order ethical and political aspects of epistemic practice. Here I expected some elaboration of the distinction, perhaps some examples to see how the distinction could be used. Instead, Fricker proceeds in a different direction. She acknowledges the postmodernist's aspirations to radical political relevance and to finding ways of accommodating epistemological difference, but she claims the postmodernist attitude is not useful for feminists (or, one might add, anyone else engaged in critical discourse from a socially disadvantaged position). Her earlier reported arguments show that postmodernism, or the postmodernist views she considers, offers flawed, untenable accounts about profound matters. What's needed instead is profound thinking about the mundane. And at the level of the mundane, what feminists, and others, have established is that different social situations provide different epistemologically relevant perspectives on matters of common interest, such as how to establish a just society. The right level for pluralism is not the Kantian level of conditions of possible experience where pluralism might ground the incommensurabilities that free communities from answerability to one another. The right level for pluralism is ground level practices, the exchanges into which we enter everyday. Epistemology, she concludes, must accommodate first order pluralism. What we then do with the resulting plurality of views, say about the just distribution of goods, she does not say.

III

Is this any improvement over the pluralism that just evades the problem of rationality? Isn't this just where I came in? In the effort to find a way out of the small circles of reason, have I just been going round in one big circle? Perhaps not. I think the way out is to pay attention to those places in Fricker's text on which my path was snagged: the contrast between authoritative and authoritarian, the question of power, and the question of the postmodern alternatives.

In preparation for finding that way out, it's worth taking stock. We've seen that, rhetorically, reason and rationality can be cudgels, used to disqualify those whose views might be inconvenient to take into account as well as to impose a view in the name of one's superior access to truth. To withhold attribution of reason and rationality is to deny that those from whom they are withheld even have the capacity to enter into reasoned discourse – their disqualification consist not in their being accused of having false views, but in their not having the ability to recognize or to present reasons for or against them. This is the use observed by LeDoeuff. On the other hand, to affirm reason and rationality of oneself or one's colleagues is usually to say something different – to say that one's views are sanctioned by some rules or standards that, if followed, transfer all or a sufficient amount of credibility from beginning points to end points. When used as a cudgel, the implication is that there's only one such set of rules or standards, the ones to which one's own passage conforms. This is the use that concerns Fricker.

There's a gap, then, between the negative and positive rhetorical uses of 'reason': the gap between a capacity and normatively sanctioned exercises of that capacity. The denial denies the capacity; the affirmation affirms satisfaction of the norms for proper exercise of that capacity. So the postmodernist's rage against reason *need not* be the rejection of the capacity, but *could be* directed at an excessively narrow conception of what the successful use of that capacity consists in. Similarly, the Rousseauian masculinist's celebration of Reason *could* be understood as the affirmation of a particular set of prescriptions, prescriptions, to be sure, thought to be differentially observed by males and females, by citizens and noncitizens, but prescriptions about which one could differ and debate. Neither the rage nor the celebration are, however, generally so understood. The rhetoric of reason, then, conceals a conflation of description and prescription. One can mean the capacity to engage in a certain kind of cognitive performance or one can mean the praiseworthiness of either a given performance or a person's overall performance. "Humans are rational" or "Primates are rational whereas other vertebrates are not." vs. "It's rational to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow." or "Hillary is a very rational man; he would never entertain such a belief." Both rage and celebration confuse the capacity with the standards or criteria for evaluating exercises of that capacity. The descriptive/prescriptive ambiguity of reason and rationality poses an additional stumbling block to useful reflection.[4]

Can feminists then just dismiss reason and rationality as rhetorical tools of patriarchy, tools that trade on equivocation? Fricker's supposition that there is an authoritative form of reason and rational discourse holds out the hope of something more. Alas, she has told us little about this authoritative form, except by indirection. If the criticism of the anti-racist is to have a bearing on the beliefs and practices of the racist, reason or rational discourse can have a bearing across systems of belief. But the claim of reason cannot be used to enforce a belief or system of belief. This would be, I presume, the authoritarian use of reason.

The question, then, is how to characterize a non-authoritarian reason. The feminist texts sharpen the question. Is it possible to develop a non-rhetorical, non-ideological, non-normative notion of reason or rationality? How might one do so? As seen earlier, the reflections of LeDoeuff and Fricker offer some guideposts. First, they teach us to be suspicious of invidious uses of the concept, of reason used to cognitively disqualify categories of person or to enforce particular views. Secondly, they alert us to the possibilities of equivocation in the oscillation between descriptive and prescriptive uses of the notion. Thirdly, if we follow Fricker, they establish a need for a concept robust enough to withstand the postmodernist's despair, yet flexible enough to accommodate pluralism.

IV

Where in the philosophical tradition might one find resources for such an account? When in a quandary, turn to Hume. Hume did, after all, have a deflationary approach to reason, being concerned to defeat the rationalists' claims that substantive truths about the universe, about substance, causality, and the soul, were accessible through use of reason alone. Reason instead was, is, the slave of the passions, not itself capable of discriminating among ends, only of helping to identify means to attainment of our ends. Such a reason cannot be authoritarian or tyrannical. Hume's version of naturalism seems a good place to start in search of a non-ideological, non-equivocating, account of reason. His account in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume 2000) both lives up to this expectation and illustrates the difficulties of naturalizing strategies in philosophy.[5]

Here is Hume's statement about the causes of belief, which he proposes as a general maxim in the science of human behavior: "when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity." (Bk. 1, Part 3, section 8) The force and vivacity engender belief. Ideas are related to one another by *resemblance*, as the picture of a friend engenders an idea of the friend; by *contiguity*, as thinking of Smith College engenders the thought of my friends who teach there; and, finally, by *cause and effect*. The picture Hume suggests seems like this:

A present impression of X, produces a lively idea of X. The idea of X, together with the relatedness of X and Y, or their association in the fancy, then produces an idea of Y. I might happen on my car key and the idea of my car key may evoke an idea of my last parking of the car, thus engendering an idea of my car in the university parking lot, which Hume would also describe as a belief that my car is in the university parking lot. The association of X and Y, or the key and the car, is a habit produced by the repeated experience of X and Y related as cause and effect. (Although he recognizes three kinds of relatedness, Hume regards the association of cause and effect as stronger than relations of resemblance or contiguity, and focuses most of the rest of his discussion on that relation.) This habit or custom of expecting Y on the basis of X acts before we have time to reflect on it, our mind passes immediately, spontaneously, from, in his example, the idea of water to the idea of sinking, or from the key to car, without reviewing the past experiences in which the two have been conjoined. It is those past experiences, however, that produce the habit.

Given that we each have unique sets of experiences and hence can be expected to develop different habits, this is a good candidate for a non-authoritarian notion, open to pluralism, etc. But does it not seem a very weak notion of reason? Should the passage of the mind from one idea to any other associated with it be classified, be dignified with the name of reason? How authoritative can that be? If I reflect on my own spontaneous transitions from one idea to another, while some seem to be paradigmatic instances of reasoning, I also see sometimes quite wild associations, a source of amusement at times, of wrong-headed conviction at others. Hume is sensitive to this question, and in Section 13 discusses "unphilosophical" species of probability, habits or principles of transition that are in the end problematic, not to be trusted. These include what twentieth century cognitive scientists might call a salience or availability bias: the greater vivacity of a more recent impression can overwhelm an association produced by many more, but older, more temporally distant, experiences. Unphilosophical probability also includes over-reliance on general rules that we rashly form for ourselves. Such general rules are, among other things, the source of what is called prejudice, e.g., as Hume illustrates, the belief that the Irish have no wit or that the French lack solidity. We can surely elaborate more examples. Some, alas, can be found in other passages of Hume, whose overall geniality is, for today's readers, undermined by occasional casual racism and sexism. But general rules may be of many kinds, and surely include the erroneous beliefs I have held – recently about the relative width of pipes for transporting water from a well to uphill holding tanks and from these to users' outlets, to cite only a recent example. Our formation of these general rules is itself explained by Hume as an effect of the experience of the formation of habits, which when articulated are also seen to be themselves general beliefs. We expect ourselves to have such beliefs or rules, and we have come to rely on them, as in the case of water and sinking or of key and car. But, a general rule that a like cause produces or is followed by a like effect involves judgments of likeness that may be insufficiently supported by experience. And inspection of the general rules we form will often reveal that many are set in opposition to each other. This means, Hume says, that we must review and compare those general rules with the more general and authentic operations of the mind.

In Section 15, he gives 8 such rules, beginning with such time-honored notions as that cause and effect must be spatially and temporally contiguous, that the cause must be prior to the effect, that there is a constant union between cause and effect. The remaining 5 strike me as parts of a rather substantive theory of causality. One at least seems at odds with contemporary notions of redundancy in biological systems.[6] But never mind the particulars; it is what Hume says of these rules that is of interest. "Here is all the logic I think proper to employ in my reasoning, and perhaps even this was not very necessary but might have been supplied by the natural principles of our understanding." (*Treatise* 1, 13, 15) He goes on to acknowledge the great complexity in nature, which requires that in applying the rules to any phenomenon, we "carefully separate what is superfluous and enquire by new experiments, if every particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it." (*Treatise* 1, 13, 15) The utmost constancy and sagacity are needed to choose the right way among the many that present themselves.

These passages are quite extraordinary. Experience may press upon the mind the habits of association on which it relies, but those habits are not all trustworthy and must be checked against a set of rules, which Hume asserts might have been supplied by the natural products of our understanding. He does not demonstrate this, nor does he undertake to show that the rules might be the outcome of their own application, another way of saying that they are supplied by the natural products of our understanding. Given that both the unreliable general rules we form for ourselves and the good rules are, like all the contents of our minds or understanding, natural products, and given that at least one of them is probably violated in contemporary science, surely we need something more to convince us that the eight rules are the ones to test all others against. Why did he not say that the foundation of these rules is in experience? That over time these rules were most often impressed upon him or us by experience? This would involve assuming that the relative frequency of the experiences that "supply" them could be a reason for treating them as our "common measure," for giving them a superior status to other rules, the *un*philosophical ones, also impressed on us by experience? Hume cannot say what it seems natural to say at this point; his argument against the justification of inductive or probable reasoning prohibits any such appeal to experience.

I also note the swiftness with which Hume passes from description of reason to prescription. Could it be that there's more to reasoning than association of ideas (of impressions) related in experience? That we could say more before moving to specify what rules might be useful for distinguishing reliable from unreliable reasoning? Hume actually gives us some ingredients for doing so. Association pure and simple can in principle connect any ideas that are not contradictory. His concern with rules, with the difference between reliable or well-founded rules and unreliable ones, suggests that reasoning is not just any old association of ideas. That rules would be relevant indicates that the association is supposed to be one in which the ideas associated bear on one another in some way (short of implication, of course, which is covered in demonstrative reason).

V

To get at this notion of bearing on, I'd like to go back to the example of the relative diameter of water pipes. My land group is installing a new water system. We've had a new well sunk, a pump and holding tanks installed, and trenches dug. We laid 2 inch and 1 and 1/4 inch pipes in the trenches between well and tanks and tanks and outlets. Hearing (or thinking I heard) one of my partners in this venture, one of the group members whom I trust in such matters, say that the wider diameter was for flow to the tank and the narrower diameter for flow from the tank, I believed this, developed a rationale for it, and, happy in my reasoning, repeated the statement to another group member, in whom I have equal confidence. She bet me $50 that the correct placement was the opposite. I declined to take the bet, but was then puzzled: which is it? So, I thought about the matter some more, considering again the relation of the pipes to the rest of the system. I realized first that a wider pipe going from the tank to the outlets would secure greater water pressure at the user outlets (showers and hydrants, among others). I then realized that a wide diameter pipe would contain a greater volume (and weight) of water per inch of length, and that a pump would have to work much harder to push a wider column of equal length than a narrower one. So, I concluded, my second friend was right. (I then realized that I might have been assuming that all outlets would be open at the same time requiring faster replenishing of the holding tanks without thinking of the power required to get the water there and possibly making some incorrect hydrodynamic assumptions. Either my first friend was tired and reversing things, had misspoken or I had misheard.)

Now, there are many things I could associate with the pipes: other white objects, other long, narrow, objects, other objects laid in trenches, pools of water, and so on. The mental process in which I engaged was not mere, or arbitrary association, but the bringing to bear of considerations relevant to solving a particular question: what diameter of pipe should carry water to the holding tank and what carry water from the tank to outlets? I might have done this well or ill, the considerations may or may not have been accurate or strong enough or weighty enough or complete enough. So, I am inclined to say that it ought to be possible to say in what reason or rationality consist without at the same time specifying what counts as commendable exercises of reason, i.e. that the capacity is not primarily the capacity to reason correctly but to reason at all, and that this capacity is something like a capacity to bring together evidentially relevant considerations, or considerations one takes to be evidentially relevant, a capacity we should be able to describe without at the same time specifying what actually counts as good evidence, or good instances of reasoning.

VI

How might this bear on the repudiations and critiques of reason and rationality with which I began? I conclude with some suggestions.

Perhaps the capacity to have and apply, whether well or ill, a concept of relevant evidence, or of reasons, is what Rousseau was referring to in the notes: a reason whose limits are not fixed, but that consists in some common principles, and common evidence, and others we arrive at on our own. The principle would be as unspecific as relevance, or specifiable connection that can be show to have a bearing on a present question. Maybe, maybe not. Rousseau's conception here may already have more prescription built into it than envisioned in the minimalist notion just advanced. But this minimalist notion could also be a way of making out the distinction Fricker thinks we ought to be able to make between a reason, a rational discourse, that is authoritative and one that is authoritarian. One might say that to be authoritative is to show the bearing, the relevance of one belief or bit of information to another belief or practice, in a way that can be appreciated, understood, by one's interlocutor, without supposing or claiming that it is decisive or determinative, unless in relation to rules agreed to by both. This would be to suggest that authoritative reasoning can be recognized as reasoning without commanding assent. The distinction between power as domination or coercion and power as the ability to have or the having of an effect might be useful in this connection. If you recognize my reasoning as reasoning, then I have had an effect on you, even if you do not accept my conclusions. If the capacity described is *authoritative* reason, then one way it differs from *authoritarian* reason is that it is open to correction, enhancement, modification through interaction with others who bring other considerations to bear on one or another of the components of one's reasoning. Circles, to the extent there are such, do not need to be exclusive or closed – observance of a concept of relevance might be what makes them circles of *reason* rather than circles of something – affinity or worship or pleasure. That which is taken to be relevant might be one point of differentiation and hence we might still have a plurality of circles rather than a single one. The postmodernist circles, the localist solutions criticized by Fricker, are internally coercive, just independent of other circles. If the bonds of reason are sufficiently loosened, they can extend across circles without compulsion internally or externally.

This concept of reason *is* normative, but minimally so. Normative because not any association will count as *reasoning* even though we might recognize as reasoning cognitive efforts that fall short of being *good* reasoning. Affirming the consequent or denying the antecedent are still instances of reasoning, even though by almost all systems of logic, they are instances of *bad* reasoning. The various other and more common deficits we might identify — incompleteness of information, failure to recognize the relevance of information one has or of beliefs or values one holds, reliance on Hume's 'rashly accepted rules' — don't defeat the claim that what I've done is to take or propose considerations as relevant to evaluating the truth or falsity, plausibility or implausibility of some proposition. In fact, bringing these deficits to my attention presupposes I was engaged in reasoning. This minimal conception leaves room for the elaboration of rules or criteria of good reasoning – what philosophers most often do in discussing rationality. Whether there's some set of such rules or criteria we all could or should observe is an open question. But I think it would be a mistake to take any such set as defining rational competence. This more basic notion requires development prior to the articulation of rules for evaluating exercises of the competence.

These modest suggestions certainly need more elaboration.[7] I suspect, however, that only a comparable modesty regarding reason will successfully call the bluff of those who associate it with exclusion, violence, and tyranny.

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Notes

[1] I'd like to thank Miriam Solomon, Hilary Kornblith, Alvin Goldman and other participants in the EPISTEME conference on Rationality for comments on the talk on which this paper is based. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Spelman for spirited discussion of these issues.

[2] For a similar localist statement in a different philosophical idiom, see Hoagland (2001).

[3] Many of those reading this may know the feeling of being reasoned at by someone who can talk circles around us. Some may also have practiced this form of verbal intimidation ourselves and some may have found mute acceptance preferable to a losing struggle. I suppose these are the behaviors Fricker would identify as concerns of an ethics of discursive practice.

[4] One might review other essays in this volume through the lens of this distinction. Is rational competence in those essays thought to be constituted by rules and principles or by some more basic capacity whose exercises can be evaluated with respect to some set of rules? I suspect it's the assumption of the universally transparent self-evidence of such rules and principles that is experienced as narrowly autocentric, if not tyrannical.

[5] Only the *Treatise* was consulted. Study of the *Enquiry* might yield different results.

[6] This is rule 5: "If several different objects produce a same effect, it must be by means of some quality common to all of them." For many important biological traits, multiple different genetic sequences are each sufficient for expression of the trait.

[7] As one form of elaboration, I would be inclined to bring these considerations into relation with the social accounts of knowledge and (epistemic) justification advanced in Longino (1990 and 2002). Here I have only prepared the ground for doing so.

Helen Longino is Professor of Philosophy at Stanford University. Her research interests center on social dimensions of scientific knowledge, social epistemology, feminist, social, and cultural studies of science and feminist epistemology. Her two major publications are *The Fate of Knowledge* (2002) and *Science as Social Knowledge* (1990).