STANDARDS, ADVICE, AND PRACTICAL REASON

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1. Introduction

It is typical for a human being that has reached maturity to have a system of standards for evaluating actions that, taken as a whole, concerns not only her own actions, but also the actions of others. The standards of one individual can conflict deeply with the standards of another. Someone might, for example, judge that her spouse should become a vegetarian, based on her conviction that, other things equal, people should not eat animals if they can nourish themselves well without doing so. Her spouse, however, might judge that it is fine to eat animals, so long as one monitors one's purchases in order to avoid supporting cruelty against animals. Or, a parent might judge that his child should find a steady job rather than try to make it as a filmmaker, based on the conviction that a life of security is preferable to a life of striving. His child, however, might judge that there's no profit in trading a life of striving for a life of security, just as, to quote Socrates, 'there's no profit in someone selling his son or daughter into slavery—slavery under savage and evil men—for even a great deal of money'.

An individual's standards for evaluating actions can conflict not only with the standards of others, but also with her own felt inclinations and her own intentions. Someone might, for example, have a hankering for veal, and form the intention to have some, even though it follows from her standards that, given what the production of veal involves, she should refrain from eating veal. Or, someone might desperately want his wife to break ties with a certain acquaintance, and beg her to do so,

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