# Rationality and intelligence

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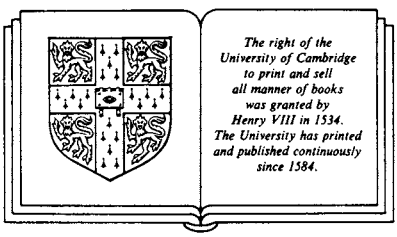


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# Preface

The roots of this book go back to the 1960s, when I began to worry about how to make experimental psychology relevant to the problems of the world, especially through the improvement of education (Baron, 1971). The two most salient figures of my undergraduate days, Skinner and Bruner, had made me think that this was possible, and that real advances in educational technology could grow out of psychological theory. Bruner (1957) also gave me—perhaps even more than he intended—a view of what aspects of human thinking need to be corrected, namely, a rigidity resulting from first impressions.

During the political turmoil of the late sixties, my wife gave me an article by Lawrence Kohlberg, and his ideas seemed to provide much enlightenment about the conflicts of those years. I spent a few years trying to work on moral reasoning, in the tradition of Kohlberg. Much of this work was done in collaboration with John Gibbs while we were both at McMaster University. I became dissatisfied with Kohlberg's scoring methods (for reasons I explain here), and I gradually diverged from Gibbs and developed a system much along the lines of Chapter 3 here.

My interest in intelligence was inspired by my wife and by the late Klaus Riegel (in graduate school) and later by Block and Dworkin's (1976) excellent collection. Earl Hunt and Robert Sternberg made the field a respectable one for experimental psychologists to enter, and for a while, I worked more or less in the tradition they established (Baron et al., 1980). Meanwhile, I had been an avid consumer of the work of Kahneman, Tversky, and others working on decisions and judgments. Although I never discussed the matter with my thesis advisor, David Krantz, I came to see the work much as he does (Krantz, 1981), as telling us where we need education—not where we (or the experimenters) are irremediably miswired. What I take to be the crucial insight behind this book came around 1980, when I saw the possible relevance of decision theory to the conduct of thinking itself. This step followed my reading of

Dewey (1933) — a book suggested to me by Jay Schulkin — and especially Nisbett and Ross (1980) with their repeated insistence on the need for normative models.

This book is written for serious students and workers in cognitive, developmental, clinical, personality, and social psychology, philosophy, education, and such related fields as decision sciences and artificial intelligence. Although there is a single thread of argument, the chapters do not draw heavily on one another, and readers should feel free to select their own path. However, chapters 1 and 3 are more central to what follows them, and one should read enough of these to get the idea before going on.

My main reason for publishing this book — despite its imperfections — is to enlist the help of others in the enterprise I describe. This enterprise is not just empirical; it is philosophical and technological as well: philosophical in its concern with normative and prescriptive theory as well as descriptive theory, and technological in its concern with educational methods.

I am grateful to many who provided comments and discussion about this book in its various stages. John Sabini read most of an early draft and steered me away from several dead ends. Robert Sternberg (as a reviewer) showed me where I was likely to be misunderstood, and provided many helpful suggestions. An anonymous reviewer gave good general advice about presentation. Barry Schwartz provided extensive criticism of a later draft from the point of view of one who both sympathizes and disagrees; I hope that the debate begun with him here will continue. More purely sympathetic, but equally helpful, criticism of that draft was provided by David Perkins and Jane Beattie. Peter Badgio, Dorritt Billman, Kathie Galotti, Lola Lopes, Harold Pashler, Marty Seligman, and Myrna Schwartz also provided detailed and helpful critiques of one or more chapters each. Of course, I have not solved all the problems my critics have raised.

I am also grateful to several people who have contributed to my education over the years: David Shapiro, Doug Davis, Dave Krantz, Lee Brooks, Henry Gleitman, John Sabini, and my wife, Judy Baron.

I dedicate this book to Judy, who exemplifies the traits this book extols, and to my son David, who I hope will live in times more rational than these.