



THE
IMPORTANCE
OF BEING
RATIONAL

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PART I

Initial Motivations

1

Introduction

Reasons Responsiveness, the Reasons Program, and Knowledge-First

We devote a good portion of our lives striving to figure out what it makes sense to do, believe, intend, desire, and hope for given our often limited information and abilities. In other words, a good portion of our lives consists in striving to be rational. This book seeks to understand what exactly we are striving for. In it, I explicate and defend a general and unified account of rationality. By the end, I hope to show that we are not mistaken for devoting so much of our lives to being rational. Rationality, in my view, is of fundamental *deontic* importance—i.e., in my view, rationality plays a fundamental role in determining how we ought to react to the world.

The thesis of the book is that what it is to be rational is to correctly respond to possessed objective normative reasons. I will call this view of rationality *Reasons Responsiveness*. I will do three things in this introductory chapter. First, I will briefly explicate what I take this claim to involve. Second, I will explain some background motivations for pursuing the project as I do. Third, I will explain the book's plan.

1.1 An Ideological Primer

1.1.1 Rationality, what

Rationality is talked about in many different ways, both in everyday life and by theorists of various stripes. One consequence of this is that there are many different concepts of rationality. These concepts pick out different properties. Before the book really gets going, I must say something about some of the core features of the property I am interested in (and thus something about which concept I am employing).

The property I am interested in is the property that has been at the heart of certain debates in metaethics and epistemology. As we'll see in chapter 2, the debates in metaethics have focused on the relationship between rationality and a certain kind of coherence. The guiding assumption of much of the metaethical literature is that the type of rationality at stake is the type that explains why one is irrational when one is incoherent. While I give an unorthodox explanation of this data, I still hold that the type of rationality I am theorizing about is the type that explains the irrationality of incoherence.

This is not the most fundamental feature of the kind of rationality I am interested in. Instead, the most fundamental feature is its connection to certain sorts of praise and criticism.¹ When one is rational in the relevant way, one is worthy of a certain kind of praise. And when one is irrational in the relevant way, one is open to a particular kind of criticism. When one is incoherent one is open to this sort of criticism. This is why it was natural to focus on incoherence, although as I'll argue in chapter 2, the focus on incoherence has led some to make some overgeneralizations about the nature of rationality.

What kind of praise and criticism is at stake? (Parfit, 2011, p. 33) nicely brings out the point:

When we call some act 'rational', using this word in its ordinary, non-technical sense, we express the kind of praise or approval that we can also express with words like 'sensible', 'reasonable', 'intelligent', and 'smart'. We use the word 'irrational' to express the kind of criticism we express with words like 'senseless', 'stupid', 'idiotic' and 'crazy'. To express weaker criticisms of this kind, we can use the phrase 'less than fully rational.'

(Kiesewetter, 2017, p. 39) makes similar remarks, albeit more tentatively (despite the tentativeness, he clearly endorses this picture):

Ordinary attributions of irrationality are commonly understood as criticism. Moreover, the criticism involved seems to be personal criticism: when agents get called irrational, they do not merely understand this to mean that they fell short of some evaluative standard; they feel personally criticized for their responses.

The sort of credit or blame one is open to when one is rational or irrational is thus a very personal evaluation. To react rationally is to show good sense; to react in a fully irrational way is to be stupid or crazy. One can react in a less than fully rational way without being crazy, but one will always be less than reasonable or sensible when one reacts in ways that fall short of full rationality.

Given the connection between rationality and these sorts of evaluation, most in metaethics and epistemology have thought that rationality is tightly connected to one's *perspective*. This view has manifested itself in metaethics via the thought that rationality is tied to coherence.² Some in epistemology have taken this tack. However, the most popular expression of this idea in epistemology has come from those who think that rationality is

... tied to a proper response to the *evidence*.³

The literature in metaethics and the literature in epistemology have thus largely diverged from each other about which parts of one's perspective matter when it comes to rationality. Metaethicists have focused on certain combinations of reactions whereas epistemologists have focused on individual reactions. As we'll see, on this issue I agree with the epistemologists. The proper focus is on reasons for particular reactions.

That said, there is an important similarity between nearly all views about rationality in metaethics and a prominent group of views about rationality in epistemology. The common feature is the assumption that rationality solely depends on *internal* features of the agent.^{4,5} According to this internalist tradition, the perspective that is relevant to rationality is the purely internal perspective. In both metaethics and epistemology internalism has been trenchantly attacked in the last twenty-plus years. One general theme of many of these attacks is that rationality is not *important* if it is merely internal. In epistemology this theme is exemplified by those who complain that internalist notions of rationality lead to skeptical worries when they are necessary conditions for *knowledge*.⁶ In metaethics this theme is exemplified by those who argue that requirements that demand coherence are not *deontically significant*—i.e., it is not the case that we always ought to comply with such requirements.⁷

A common reaction to these worries is to move to a view of rationality that places little emphasis on the perspective of the agent. As one might expect, by doing this one easily loses any connection to the sort of praise and blame that Parfit refers to. This has led many to think that non-perspectival externalist views are not even candidate views of rationality since they fail to explain essential features of the sort of rationality in question.

The view defended in this book is a kind of perspectival externalism. As we'll see, I think rationality is essentially perspectival. However, the perspective that is relevant is not purely internal. The perspective that is relevant depends on facts that are outside of one's head. To put it colloquially, the reactions that are rational are determined by the information that one has, including information about the world outside of one's head. The resulting view of rationality maintains the connection with praise and blame and, I claim, is of great importance.

1.1.2 Reasons Responsiveness as a real definition

The next point to make is that I see Reasons Responsiveness as providing a *real definition* of the property of being rational.⁸ Thus, according to Reasons Responsiveness, the essence of the property of being rational is that the bearer of this property is correctly responding to the objective normative reasons that are possessed.

Real definition, it should be said, is a metaphysical matter. I am thus not providing a theory about the semantics of our talk about rationality, nor am I providing an account of the *concept* of rationality. I am providing a theory about the nature of the thing that our concept *refers* to. While it is plausible that the nature of our concept places some constraints on theories about the metaphysics of the referent of our concept (rationality, e.g., couldn't turn out to be composed out of footballs), when one provides a real definition, one is not providing an analysis of our concept.

Many different things can be rational—people, actions, intentions, beliefs, fears, joys, preferences, credences. Reasons Responsiveness provides a real definition of the property that all of those things have when they are rational. Thus, Reasons Responsiveness predicts that people, actions, intentions, beliefs, fears, joys, preferences, and credences (among other things) are

rational when they correctly respond to possessed objective normative reasons.

It's not immediately clear whether the rationality of agents is more fundamental than the rationality of reactions or *vice versa*. According to the Agent First view, particular reactions of an agent—actions, intentions, beliefs, desires, etc.—are rational in virtue of the fact that the agent rationally reacts in those ways. According to the Reaction First view, agents are rational in virtue of the fact that their reactions are rational. I'm inclined to accept the Reaction First view. Agents correctly respond to reasons when their reactions are correct responses to the reasons they possess for those reactions. Thus, what is fundamental are the reactions and the possessed reasons for them. The rationality of people falls out of the rationality of their reactions.⁹ Although I am inclined towards this view, I will not defend it here. Either view sits well with Reasons Responsiveness.

I should contrast Reasons Responsiveness with other views that hold that there are reasons to be rational. According to a type of view that has received an enormous amount of attention from John Broome and Niko Kolodny, there are reasons to be rational.¹⁰ However, on this view, what is rational is not determined by reasons. Instead, rationality is determined by facts about coherence.¹¹

According to the type of view discussed by Kolodny and Broome, we can discover what the requirements of rationality are independently from whether there are reasons to be rational. Once we do this, we can then ask if there are any reasons to comply with the coherence requirements. Broome focuses most of his energy thinking about whether the fact that rationality requires -ing is itself a reason to . Kolodny (and Broome to some extent) explores different possibilities. However, both

discussions assume that the requirements of rationality are a function of something other than reasons.

Reasons Responsiveness is significantly different from the view that Broome and Kolodny discuss. I have no interest in defending the view they discuss. I am not, that is, interested in whether we have reasons to comply with coherence requirements.¹² I am instead interested in whether the requirements of rationality are themselves determined by reasons. This is what Reasons Responsiveness predicts. We will return to the relationships between Reasons Responsiveness and coherence requirements in chapters 2 and 8.

1.1.3 *Objective normative reasons, what*

Now let me briefly introduce the basic ideology of Reasons Responsiveness. I'll start with *objective normative reasons*. Objective normative reasons are facts that count in favor of various reactions.¹³ Usually they are facts about the world (as opposed to facts about one's mental states). Some examples: The fact that I promised to give this chapter to someone tomorrow is a reason for me to write this introduction as soon as possible. The fact that it is going to rain in the city I'm traveling to next week is a reason for me to intend to bring an umbrella. The fact that you yawned is a reason to believe you didn't get enough sleep last night. The fact that you would be better off if you got a job is a reason for you to desire to get a job.

One project I do *not* take up in this book is the project of figuring out *what it takes* for some fact to be an objective normative reason.¹⁴ I am taking it for granted that there are objective normative reasons. That said, I do think there are some earmarks of normative reasons that we can use as heuristics for determining whether some fact is a normative reason. Not all of

these earmarks are completely theory-neutral, but I think that nearly all going theories of normative reasons embrace some of them.

One earmark is that objective normative reasons are the types of things that explain whether an attitude or action has strict normative statuses like justification, rightness, or correctness.¹⁵ If some fact f can explain why some action is justified, right, or correct, then (it is very likely that) f is a normative reason to .

Another earmark is being able to justifiably for f . When one s for f , f is the consideration that moves one to . If one can justifiably with f as one's reason for -ing, then it is very likely that f is a normative reason to .¹⁶

A third earmark is the possibility that the relevance of f is mitigated by some other facts. Objective normative reasons can be *defeated* by other considerations. The reason to write this introduction isn't as weighty when I have multiple chapters that also need to be written than when it is the last thing I have to write. The fact that I have multiple chapters to write weakens the reason to write this introduction. Thus, if it seems like the relevance of f to -ing can be attenuated (or intensified) by adding or subtracting facts, it is very likely that f is a normative reason.

At various points in the book, I will use these earmarks to help determine whether some fact is a normative reason. In some cases, I will use the earmarks to argue that facts that many take to not be objective normative reasons really are objective normative reasons. I thus think there are more normative reasons than many moral philosophers. It will be important for the plausibility of my view about rationality that there are more reasons than is traditionally thought. So the views in the book do depend on taking some stands on issues having to do with what it takes to be

a normative reason. All of my arguments for my extensional claims will rely on the earmarks. Since (at least some subset of) the earmarks seem to me to be absolutely central to the notion of a normative reason, I am moved by my arguments. It's important for me to confess at the outset though that I will not be directly engaging with systematic theories of what it takes for some fact to be an objective normative reason. There are only so many battles I can fight.

1.1.4 Possessed normative reasons, what

There are a lot of normative reasons out there. Many of them I don't know anything about. The ones I don't know anything about are reasons for me to act, believe, intend, and desire, but they aren't reasons to act, believe, intend, and desire that I possess.¹⁷ In order to possess a reason, I need to stand in some special epistemic relation to the fact that constitutes that reason. For example, I possess the reason to intend to take my umbrella next week because the weather report informed me that it is going to rain in the city I am traveling to. Similarly, I possess the reason to believe you didn't get enough sleep because I saw you yawn.

As we will see in chapters 2 and 4, standing in the privileged epistemic relation to some fact that is a reason is not sufficient for possession. One can stand in the epistemic relation but fail to possess the fact as the reason it is if one doesn't 'see' the normative relevance of the fact. Chapter 4 will provide a view of what it takes to 'see' the relevance.

I think that the only reasons relevant to rationality are the possessed reasons. This is because it is implausible that reasons completely outside of your ken can affect what it is rational for you to do. If I have no clue that you just yawned, the fact that you yawned doesn't have any effect on which stance it is rational for me to take on the question of how much sleep you got last night.

On the other hand, if the fact that you yawned is within my ken, it does seem to bear on which stance I should take on that question.

In chapters 3 and 4, I will defend a novel view of possession.

1.1.5 *Correctly responding to possessed normative reasons, what*

Suppose the fact that you yawned is a strong enough reason to make it rational to believe you didn't get enough sleep last night. And suppose further that I both possess that reason and believe that you didn't get enough sleep last night. Is this sufficient for my token belief to be rational? In a word: No.

The reason why this is not sufficient for my belief to be rational is that it is possible for all of that to be true even though I don't *correctly respond* to the reason provided by the fact that you yawned. In the simplest kind of case, this is because there is no connection at all between my belief and that reason. Suppose I believe that you didn't get enough sleep because it's Tuesday and I believe (without good reason) that you never get enough sleep on Monday nights.

This case highlights the common distinction between *ex post* and *ex ante* rationality.^{18,19} When a reaction is *ex ante* rational for an agent A, A is in a position to react rationally. The fact that you yawned, when it is possessed as a reason to believe you didn't get enough sleep last night, makes it the case that it is *ex ante* rational for me to believe you didn't get enough sleep last night (absent defeaters). However, it being *ex ante* rational to believe you didn't get enough sleep last night does not guarantee that I have a token belief that is rational. For one, I might not believe you didn't get enough sleep (hence the name *ex ante*). Further, I might have a belief that is not formed in the right way to count as rational. When this happens, I am *ex ante* rational but not *ex post* rational. On my view, in order for a token reaction to be *ex post* rational, one has to respond *for* the reasons that make the reaction *ex ante*

rational. This is what I think it is to correctly respond to the reasons you possess.

Thus, on my view, a token ϕ -ing is *ex post* rational when (i) one possesses normative reasons to ϕ that are sufficiently weighty, and (ii) one ϕ s for those reasons.

In chapter 5, I will defend a view of what it takes to ϕ for normative reasons. In chapter 6, I will defend a view about what it takes to react for motivating reasons. As we will see, I think these are different in kind. I thus end up defending a disjunctivist view about reacting for reasons.

1.1.6 *The requirements of rationality*

Reasons Responsiveness provides a real definition of the property of rationality. It does not provide a real definition of *rational requirement* or *rational permission*. It does direct us towards views about requirements and permissions, though. Rational requirements and permissions will be connected to correct responses to the possessed reasons. Rational Permission and Rational Requirement are plausible claims (although not real definitions) about permissions and requirements in terms of correct responses.²⁰

Permission-Correctness Link: A reaction R of an agent A is rationally permitted just in case R is a correct response to A 's possessed reasons for and against R .

Requirement-Uniquely Correct Link: A reaction R of an agent A is rationally required just in case R is the only correct response to A 's possessed reasons for and against R .

While I think that Permission-Correctness Link and Requirement-Uniquely Correct Link are true, I also think we can say more. This is because we can say more about when a reaction is a correct

response and more about when a reaction is the only correct response. We can do this by appealing to *possessed sufficient reasons* and *possessed decisive reasons*.²¹

When a set of reasons *S* for a reaction *R* is sufficient, *S* is just as weighty as the weight of the sets of reasons to react in ways other than *R*. When *S* is decisive, *S* is weightier than the weight of the sets of reasons to react in ways other than *R*. I think we can give a real definition of rational permission in terms of sufficiency and a real definition of rational requirement in terms of decisiveness. This gives us Rational Permission and Rational Requirement:

Rational Permission: What it is for a reaction *R* of agent *A* to be rationally permitted is for the reasons *A* possesses for *R* to be sufficient.

Rational Requirement: What it is for a reaction *R* of agent *A* to be rationally required is for the reasons *A* possesses for *R* to be decisive.

A prediction of Rational Permission is that you are only rationally permitted to do things that you possess reasons for that are just as weighty as the reasons you possess to do anything else. A prediction of Rational Requirement is that you are only rationally required to do things that you possess reasons for that are weightier than the reasons you possess to do anything else. I think these are plausible predictions. If you possess reasons to that are weightier than the reasons you possess to , -ing is not rational. If the set of reasons you possess to are weightier than the reasons you possess for any other reaction, then you are not rational if you do not .

We can extract from Rational Requirement the following requirement schemata:

Action Schema: If the set of reasons S that A possesses to ϕ is decisive, then A is rationally required to ϕ .

Belief Schema: If the set of reasons S that A possesses to believe p is decisive, then A is rationally required to believe p .

Intention Schema: If the set of reasons S that A possesses to intend to ϕ is decisive, then A is rationally required to intend to ϕ .

As it is with normative reasons, I will not be defending analyses of sufficiency and decisiveness. I have defended the views I just explained elsewhere (as have others).²² I will assume that reasons can weigh up in such a way that the reactions they favor are permitted or required. As far as background assumptions in philosophy go, this seems like a dialectically solid one. I am happy for the main conclusions of the book to be conditional on there being sufficient and decisive objective normative reasons.²³

Further, I do not think that the most interesting action lies in whether there are sufficient or decisive objective normative reasons. The most interesting action lies in whether we can connect these things to one's perspective in the way that rationality is connected to one's perspective. For this reason, I will be centrally concerned in the book about what it takes to possess reasons and correctly respond to reasons. It is here that I will connect objective normative reasons to particular people in particular situations.

With this primer on the ideology in hand, let me turn to some background motivations for the project.

1.2 The Reasons Program and Knowledge-First

1.2.1 The Reasons Program

One of the big ideas in metanormative theory in the last twenty-five years is the idea that normative reasons are fundamental in some sense. While there are various ways to understand this thought, the version that excites me the most holds that reasons are *metaphysically fundamental*. Once again, there are many ways of understanding what this amounts to. As I think of it, reasons are metaphysically fundamental because they are the fundamental *normative* entities. To use a physical analogy, they are the building blocks of normativity. *How* (if at all) they build up normativity is an interesting and undertheorized question. Sticking with my preferred ideology, I am interested in defending the claim that reasons are normatively fundamental because we can provide real definitions of all of the complex normative properties in terms of normative reasons. I will call this view *Reasons Fundamentalism*. Reasons Fundamentalism is the main tenet of what I call The Reasons Program.

For the sake of clarity, it must be said that Reasons Fundamentalism *does not* entail that reasons are *primitive*. That is, it does not entail that reasons are fundamental *tout court*. It just says that reasons are normatively fundamental. It might be that we can provide a real definition of reasons in terms of something that is not normative.²⁴

Reasons Fundamentalism is an extremely ambitious claim. It commits one to many different controversial claims all across normative philosophy. It commits you, for example, to defending reasons based accounts of evaluative properties like goodness, badness, betterness, worseness, good for, bad for, deontic properties like rightness, wrongness, ought, required, permitted, rational, correct and hypological properties like blameworthiness, praiseworthiness, virtue, and vice.²⁵ It also commits you to ruling out any other normatively fundamental

entities. Defending Reasons Fundamentalism is thus a monumental task. Hence its philosophical interest.

One method—a method that is admittedly slow— of defending Reasons Fundamentalism is by defending real definitions of particular normative phenomena in terms of normative reasons. As you may have guessed, I see this book contributing to a pursuit of this method. One motivation for the book, then, is to show that we can do some impressive theoretical work by analyzing rationality in terms of reasons.

Given that rationality seems like a normative property, reasons fundamentalists need to be interested in it. This is motivation enough for someone like me to have an interest in the correct theory of rationality. In fact, though, there are much more interesting reasons for fundamentalists to be interested in rationality. This is because much of the literature in the last twenty years about rationality has been about how rationality comes apart from normative reasons.²⁶ Most of the most prominent theorists about rationality in the last twenty years have thought that there was a gap between what rationality requires and what the reasons require.

If this is right, then the fundamentalist is faced with an uncomfortable dilemma. The dilemma hinges on whether she holds that rationality is normative. If she thinks that it is, then Reasons Fundamentalism is false. Rationality is normative but cannot be understood in terms of normative reasons. This is the dilemma's first horn. One obvious way out of this is to deny that rationality is normative. But that is a very surprising claim. Indeed, many will think that it is a Moorean truth that rationality is normative. At the very least, few neutral observers will be willing to give up the claim that rationality is normative just to hold onto Reasons Fundamentalism. This is the second horn of

the dilemma.²⁷

The debate about rationality, then, is a debate that is particularly hostile for the fundamentalist. Given this, I think it is a good place to locally test the plausibility of fundamentalism. That is what I will do here. As we'll see, I think that theorizing about rationality in terms of reasons is a fruitful enterprise. This will in turn provide some support for Reasons Fundamentalism. For the most part, I will not engage with arguments against fundamentalism per se. Instead, I will focus on arguments that threaten my views about rationality. Many of these are also arguments against fundamentalism insofar as they threaten a reasons first account rationality.

1.2.2 *Knowledge-first*

While metaethicists have been interested in the Reasons Program, epistemologists have become interested in their own debate about fundamentality.²⁸ This debate is about the relative fundamentality of *knowledge*. This epistemological debate has been about whether we should understand knowledge in terms of notions like rationality or justification or whether we should instead understand notions like justification and rationality in terms of knowledge.²⁹ Those who take the latter route have come to be known as proponents of knowledge-first epistemology. Just like it is with Reasons Fundamentalism, there are many ways of understanding this program. I will again have a metaphysical understanding. More specifically, I will understand the knowledge-first program as claiming that we can provide real definitions of properties like justification and rationality in terms of knowledge.³⁰

This book will also defend a knowledge-first view of rationality. This is because, as we'll see in chapter 3, I will argue

that the best way to understand the epistemic condition on possessing a normative reason is in terms of knowledge. Specifically, I will argue that in order to possess a reason, one must be in a position to know the fact that constitutes that reason. Since I analyze rationality in terms of possession, and possession (partly) in terms of knowledge, I end up analyzing rationality partly in terms of knowledge. This is enough to make me a proponent of knowledge-first epistemology. I see the fruits of this book as strong reasons in favor of such an approach.

It is also worth noting that not only do I think that knowledge-*that* is more fundamental than rationality, I also think that knowledge-*how* is more fundamental than rationality. This is because I analyze both possession and correctly responding to reasons in terms of knowledge-*how*. Indeed, the real definition of possession that I will defend in chapter 4 defines possession directly in terms of knowledge-*how*. According to that view, what it is to possess a reason r to ϕ is to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use r to ϕ .³¹ In chapter 5, I will argue further that what it is to correctly respond to a reason r to ϕ is to *manifest* one's knowledge about how to use r to ϕ . Thus, not only does the book defend a knowledge-first view that has had much of the spotlight recently, it also defends a relatively neglected knowledge-first view.

As it is with fundamentalism, I will largely not directly engage with arguments against the knowledge-first program *per se*. Instead, I will focus on arguments against my particular views about rationality. Many of these arguments—especially those in chapters 3 and 7—are arguments against the knowledge-first program. I think my views win the day. While there might be more general reasons against the knowledge-first program, I will argue that a particular implementation of the program does well on the ground, as it were.

1.3 The Plan

Here is the plan. The book is broken up into four parts. The first part provides initial motivations for Reasons Responsiveness. Part I is made up of this chapter and the next. Chapter 2 will situate and defend Reasons Responsiveness in the debate about rationality in metaethics. As I said above, this debate has been dominated by the thought that rationality is constitutively tied to coherence. It has become popular to believe that rationality merely requires coherence. This is pretheoretically unintuitive, for it seems very plausible that some actions and attitudes are sometimes rationally required. Reasons Responsiveness predicts this. The chapter will have two goals. The first is to show that Reasons Responsiveness can withstand the scrutiny of some prominent arguments by John Broome for the conclusion that rationality does not consist in correctly responding to reasons. The second goal is to show that Reasons Responsiveness can explain the most important data motivating the coherentist view, which is that, at least usually, one is irrational when one is incoherent. Reasons Responsiveness can thus explain the data motivating its metaethical rivals while avoiding some unintuitive predictions.

Part II is about possessing reasons. It is made up of chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 is about the issue that has occupied nearly all of the literature's attention. This is the question of which epistemic relation is needed for possession. I will lay out three roles that possession is supposed to play. I will then argue by elimination that the best theory holds that in order to possess r , one must be in a position to know r . Chapter 4 is about an issue that has almost been completely neglected by the literature. Nearly all have thought that meeting the epistemic condition on possession was both necessary *and* sufficient for possession. I argue first that this

is false (we will also see why this is false in chapter 2). The epistemic condition is merely necessary. One also has to meet what I call the practical condition. In order to meet the practical condition, one must be sensitive to the way in which the fact is a reason. I will argue that the practical condition is being in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use the fact as a reason. I will argue, finally, that rather than thinking possession is a conjunctive relation, we should think that being in a position to know r is a background condition on being in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use r . This gives us the view that what it is for an agent A to possess a reason r to ϕ is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use r to ϕ .

Part III is about responding to reasons. It is made up of chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5, I defend my view of correctly responding to normative reasons. This view is tightly connected to my view of possession. I argue that what it is to correctly respond to normative reasons is to manifest one's knowledge about how to use r as a normative reason. As I understand it, this is a causal account of reacting for normative reasons. Causal accounts have infamous issues with *deviant causal chains*. The main argument I give for my view is that my view can solve these problems with deviant causal chains. This is because, when one manifests one's know-how, dispositions that are directly sensitive to normative facts are manifesting. Thus, the competences involved in the relevant know-how make one directly sensitive to the normative facts. This is what is needed to avoid deviant causal chains.

An interesting consequence of this view about reacting for normative reasons is that it seems to leave out a closely related phenomenon, which is reacting for *motivating reasons*. It's clear that sometimes we react for reasons that aren't normative reasons, either because we are misinformed or because we have

the wrong normative views. My view of reacting for normative reasons cannot be extended to explain these cases. This doesn't sit well with most work on the relationship between these cases, which holds that we must understand them both in terms of the same relation. This dialectic is the context for chapter 6, where I argue that we should be *disjunctivists* about reacting for reasons in the sense that we should think that there are two different reacting for reasons relations. There is the reacting for normative reasons relation and the reacting for motivating reasons relation. In chapter 6, I sketch a new view of reacting for motivating reasons and show how it is connected to my account of acting for normative reasons.

With the main ideology of my view in hand, Part IV is about two important problems in the debate about rationality. It is made up of chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 is about the New Evil Demon problem for externalist views of rationality. Externalist views hold that the rational status of our attitudes and actions doesn't supervene on our non-factive internal states—i.e., on the states that we can be in even if the content is false. Externalist theories are plagued by the New Evil Demon problem. In order to see the problem, reflect on the following two characters. Sam inhabits the actual world. She thus sees lots of sights, hears lots of sounds, and learns lots of things via inference. Now consider Pam. She is Sam's non-factive internal state duplicate—i.e., Sam and Pam have all the same non-factive internal states. The catch is that Pam is radically deceived by an evil demon. None of her beliefs about the external world are true. Many have the strong intuition that Sam is rational just in case Pam is. It is hard to see how the externalist can capture this thought since the externalist thinks that Sam and Pam have much different rationalizers (since they are in much different positions with respect to the external factors relevant to rationality).

I am an externalist. This is because I think that the reasons you possess are facts that you are in a position to know. Thus, on my view, Sam has many more reasons than Pam since she's in a position to know many more facts about the external world. So I have the New Evil Demon problem. I argue that my view can solve the problem. That is, I argue that on my view Sam is rational just in case Pam is. This is so despite the fact that they don't possess the same reasons.

I also argue that there is another problem, the New New Evil Demon problem, that is even worse than the New Evil Demon problem. The New New Evil Demon problem is anchored in the thought that even if Pam always possesses sufficiently strong reasons, it is implausible that she always correctly responds to those reasons. Thus, it is implausible that her token attitudes and actions are rational. I argue that my view about reacting for a normative reason gives us the resources to solve this problem. Thus, I think that my view can solve both Evil Demon problems.

The final chapter is about the deontic importance of rationality. Despite a long history of thinking that rationality has a tight connection with what we ought to do, it has recently become popular to think that it is not the case that we ought to be rational. The final chapter takes up this challenge. I argue that my view can vindicate the claim that we ought to be rational. Indeed, I argue that what we ought to do *just is* what we are rationally required to do. Thus, rationality has ultimate deontic significance.

I argue for this by arguing that what we ought to do is a function of the normative reasons we possess. The anchor of the argument is that in order for some reason to obligate, it has to be potentially action guiding in a certain sense—it has to potentially be the reason for which one acts. The rub is that a reason can be potentially action guiding in this sense only if we possess the

reason. At the end of the day, I argue, both our full stop obligations and the requirements of rationality are a function of the reasons we possess. That is, our full stop obligations just are what rationality requires of us.

I thus end up thinking that rationality is centrally important to the task of figuring out how to live. The importance of being rational is that by being rational we are living up to the standards we are obliged to live up to.

¹ Cf. Kieseewetter, 2017, ch. 2.

² The main proponent of this view is John Broome (much of the work culminated in Broome (2013)). Other proponents are Kolodny (2005), Schroeder (2009b), Brunero (2010), Way (2010a).

³ The number of prominent proponents of evidentialism is massive. Feldman & Conee (1985) brought the term 'evidentialism' to the fore. Williamson (2000) provides a popular view that is very different from Conee and Feldman's.

⁴ In epistemology, see Bonjour (1980), Feldman & Conee (1985), Fumerton (1995), Pollock & Cruz (1999), Wedgwood (2002, 2017). In metaethics, see Kolodny (2005), Wedgwood (2007, 2017), Schroeder (2009b), Broome (2013).

⁵ There are many different notions of 'internal' floating around in the literature. The least partisan notion is spelled out in terms of supervenience. Thus, many often define internalism as the view that justification supervenes on some sort of internal states. I prefer cashing things out in terms of dependence because supervenience could be true even if it were the case that what is rational is determined by external facts. In fact, in chapter 7, I will argue that my view is precisely like this. See Ichikawa (2018) for related discussion.

⁶ See, for example, Williamson (2000).

⁷ See, for example, Kolodny (2005).

⁸ For substantive views of real definition, see Wedgwood (2007), Rosen (2015).

⁹ This is not to deny that there is a *capacity* that can be aptly called

rationality. People might have that capacity independently of the rationality of their particular reactions. But having the capacity is not sufficient for having the property of being rational, as I understand it. In order to have that property, one's reactions must be rational.

¹⁰ This view is discussed most prominently in Kolodny (2005, 2007a, b) and Broome (2005a, b, 2007c, 2008a).

¹¹ Chapters 2 and 8 will discuss these views extensively.

¹² It is important to note that this is not equivalent to the claim that we always have reasons to be in a coherent state. In chapter 2, I will argue that whenever we are incoherent, we are doing something we possess decisive reasons not to do. But this isn't to immediately say that we have reasons to comply with the coherence requirements. This is just to say that we have reasons to do something that guarantees that we are coherent. In order to have reasons to comply with coherence requirements, we need to have reasons to be coherent that are over and above our reasons to have particular attitudes. This is spelled out more fully in chapter 8, §8.2.2.

¹³ There are many ways in which this gloss is unsatisfactory. One is the famous wrong kind of reasons problem (see D'Arms & Jacobson (2000), Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), Schroeder (2010), Lord & Sylvan (MS)). Another that arises in the epistemic case is exactly which probabilifying relation must hold—e.g., whether it must be objective or if it can be subjective. See Sylvan (2016) for more on this.

¹⁴ For my initial forays into this inquiry, see Lord & Sylvan (MS) and Lord (MSb).

¹⁵ Not everyone thinks that all of these statuses are explained by reasons—e.g., McHugh & Way (FC) and Maguire (FC). Nevertheless, even these authors think that *some* strict statuses are explained by normative reasons (for Way and McHugh, I take it, deontic strict statuses fit the bill; for Maguire it will be strict statuses for actions).

¹⁶ There is a large debate about whether being able to for *f* is necessary for *f* to be a reason to (see, e.g., Setiya (2007b), Manne (2014), Markovits (2014)). I needn't take a stand about this issue in order to use this as an earmark, for everyone thinks that we can react for most reasons even if there are some exceptions.

¹⁷ Kiesewetter (2017, 2018) argues that there is no distinction here by arguing that the only reasons there are reasons that are within one's

perspective (this view is also held by Gibbons (2010, 2013) and is flirted with by Dancy (2000). Most of what Dancy says is weaker than Kieseewetter's view and is, I think, more naturally accounted for by the view I defend in chapter 8 and in Lord (2015)). All of the facts that recommend that are outside of one's perspective are merely *potential* reasons on his account. His main motivation for adopting this view is to defend a view like Reasons Responsiveness, especially in light of the counterexamples discussed in chapter 2. I see little reason to go in for Kieseewetter's more extreme view, especially given the many theoretical roles unpossessed reasons can play—e.g., in giving accounts of *correctness* (cf. Schroeder (2015c), Lord (2018a)), *advice* (cf. Lord (2015)), and *value* (cf. Ewing (1959), Scanlon (1998)), among many other things. Further, as I will show in chapter 2 (cf. Lord (2014a)), one doesn't need to adopt Kieseewetter's extreme view in order to defend an account like Reasons Responsiveness.

¹⁸ Epistemologists usually mark this distinction by appealing to propositional and doxastic rationality. I do not use those terms because they do not fit well with all reactions that can be rational—e.g., it makes little sense to speak of an action being doxastically rational. The original idea was introduced by Goldman (1979) using the *ex ante* / *ex post* language. See Wedgwood (2013) for further discussion about the terminology.

¹⁹ As a follow-up to note 18, it should be pointed out that not everyone thinks that the propositional/doxastic distinction lines up perfectly with the *ex ante* / *ex post* distinction. For one detractor, see Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013).

²⁰ As we saw in the last subsection, one can have the correct response even though one does not correctly respond. This is important to remember when interpreting Permission-Correctness Link and Requirement-Uniquely Correct Link.

²¹ For more on these notions, see Schroeder (2015d), Lord & Maguire (2016), and especially Lord (2018a).

²² See Lord (2018a), Schroeder (2015c,d). For a similar view, see Horty (2012). For more general discussion, see Lord & Maguire (2016).

²³ As we will see later, sufficiency and decisiveness are relative in important ways. As I will argue in chapter 7, the relevant weighings for rationality are the weighings of possessed reasons against each other. The results of these weighings will often diverge from the results of the

weighings of all of the reasons against each other. So, to be more precise, I think the main results are conditional on there being sufficient and decisive possessed objective normative reasons.

²⁴ For versions of this project, see Schroeder (2007), Lord & Sylvan (MS).

²⁵ I've carried out some of this work elsewhere. For a partial defense of a reasons based account of evaluative properties, see Lord & Sylvan (MS). For a reasons based account of moral rightness/wrongness, see Lord (2016a). For a reasons based account of ought, see Lord (2015, 2017b) (see also chapter 8). For a reasons based account of correctness, see Lord (2018a). For a reasons based account of praiseworthiness, see Lord (2017a).

²⁶ There are two main camps that think that reasons and rationality come apart. The first camp thinks this because they think that rationality merely requires coherence. Since you can be coherent and not do what the reasons require, people in this camp conclude that what rationality requires comes apart from what the reasons require. This camp is led by John Broome (see especially Broome (1999)). I defend my view against this camp in chapters 2 and 8 (as we'll see, things have gotten more complicated since 1999). The second camp thinks objective reasons and rationality come apart because they think that what rationality requires is determined by *apparent* or *subjective* reasons, which are determined by one's beliefs. Since one can have false beliefs, what apparent reasons require and what the objective reasons require can come apart. Thus, theorists in this camp infer that rationality and reasons come apart. The founder of this camp is Parfit (1997). I defend my view against this camp in chapters 3, 4, and 7.

²⁷ Although rarely discussed explicitly, this seems to be the horn that most fundamentalists embrace. This is explicit with Parfit (see Parfit (2011)). Scanlon also seems to take this tack (see Scanlon (2007)). Although not a card carrying fundamentalist, Niko Kolodny also takes this tack in Kolodny (2005, 2007a).

²⁸ This was sparked mostly by Williamson (2000)'s claims that evidence is knowledge and that we should analyze justification in terms of evidence.

²⁹ As far as I know, no one has suggested that knowledge is epistemically fundamental in the way that reasons fundamentalists suggest that reasons are fundamental. Rather, the debate in epistemology has been about the relative fundamentality of knowledge and rationality/justification. Thus, I am not embracing the claim that knowledge is fundamental *tout court*. It

might be that it is analyzable. That project obviously has a bearing on the Reasons Program. If knowledge is normative, then the Reasons Program demands that it be analyzed in terms of reasons (see Schroeder (2015b,c), Lord (2018a)). This will be difficult if my knowledge-first version of Reasons Responsiveness is true since one of the most popular analyses of knowledge is rationality/justification. This still does not rule out analyzability since knowledge might be non-normative (see Sylvan (FC)). I am undecided on these issues.

³⁰ Cf. Ichikawa & Jenkins (2017).

³¹ You might wonder where knowledge-that went. I argue that knowing the fact that constitutes r is a necessary condition of being in a position to manifest the relevant know-how.

2

The Coherent and the Rational

2.1 Introduction

Sometimes you are rational only when you have particular beliefs, intentions, desires, or perform particular actions. To give some examples, given that the evidence overwhelmingly supports believing that the earth is older than 300 years (and I'm considering whether it is), it would be irrational for me to not believe that the earth is older than 300 years. Similarly, given my (rational) intention to provide for my children's basic needs and my (required) belief that in order for me to provide for them I must make money, it seems like I would not be rational if I didn't intend to make money. Finally, given that I (rationally) desire to eat my supper by 6 and I know that in order to do that I have to go home in 7 minutes, it seems like I would not be rational if I didn't go home in 7 minutes. It's clear: Sometimes rationality requires me to have particular attitudes and perform particular actions.¹

Or maybe not. As it happens, the most popular view of rationality in the literature on practical reason denies that rationality ever requires one to have particular attitudes or

*image
not
available*

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