

# Reasons and the Good

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## 2

# Reasons

### 1. NORMATIVE REASONS

In the previous chapter I suggested that there are no ultimate moral reasons. That is to say, there is no reason to do what is morally right, what one ought to do, what is kind or just, or whatever, except in so far as there is some ultimate reason that can be stated in non-moral terms. I may have a derivative reason to do what morality requires, but only because doing so will, say, promote my own well-being. Equally, of course, it may be that there are no ultimate reasons at all, to be moral or anything else. We cannot decide whether there are ultimate reasons for action, or how we should characterize the notion of a reason for action, until we have a candidate to consider. So let me suggest the agent's well-being as a source of an ultimate reason: the property some action has of furthering the agent's own well-being is a reason for that agent to perform that action, a reason which varies in strength in proportion to the degree of promotion. What I must now do is to articulate that reason and its nature further. It will turn out that much of what I have to say is in defence of the very idea of such a reason, but I hope that even while providing that defence I shall be able also to clarify the positive aspects of the claim.

The notion of 'reason' is used in many different ways, and for many different purposes, both in everyday life and in philosophy. Some believe that the term's sense is therefore so unclear that it should be avoided. But because one of the fundamental issues in practical ethics is ultimate reasons for action, avoiding the term would or should result only in the introduction of a synonym. Rather we must try to get clearer on the different kinds of reason, initially by drawing distinctions between them.

The first distinction is between *epistemic* reasons and *practical* reasons. The paradigm example of an epistemic reason is a reason for some belief. There will be certain distinctions to be drawn between different kinds of epistemic reason analogous to those distinctions I shall draw below between practical reasons, but a simple example will suffice for the

present to capture the epistemic–practical distinction. I believe I am a popular person, but there is strong evidence available to the contrary. No one has called me for several months, I never receive presents on my birthday, people avoid my gaze. This evidence provides me with epistemic reasons to believe that I am unpopular, but were I to come to believe this I would become suicidally depressed.

It might be thought that there is here a conflict between epistemic and practical reasons, on the assumption that I have a practical reason to believe that I am not unpopular. In fact, however, there is no conflict. Practical reasons are reasons for *action*, and belief or believing is best understood not to be an action in the sense in which practical ethics is most interested. Exactly what belief is—a state, a disposition, an attitude—is not, for present purposes, important; what matters is that it is not an action, rather something that can be ascribed in explanation of actions.

But now imagine that I am considering the evidence concerning my popularity. What judgement should I come to? What should I decide? Judging and deciding do seem to be actions, so if we allow that evidence for  $p$  counts in favour of judging that  $p$  then it might appear that we have a case in which epistemic and practical reasons conflict. Above, however, I distinguished epistemic from practical reasons by saying that the former were for beliefs, while the latter were for actions. So the conflict in the case of judgement would be between practical reasons grounded epistemically (in the nature of evidence) and those grounded in the well-being of the agent.

Are there epistemically grounded practical reasons? Cases such as that of my judgement about my popularity indeed suggest that there are. But I wish now to claim that there are not, since such reasons are inconsistent with an independent and very plausible principle concerning normative reasons, that subclass of practical reasons concerned with reasons for action:

*Welfarism about Reasons.* Any ultimate reason for action must be grounded in well-being.

The mere fact that the evidence favours  $p$ , then, cannot be in itself a reason for me to judge that  $p$ . Now it may be that judging on the basis of available evidence is itself a constituent of well-being; but then the normative weight would rest on well-being, not on the fact that the evidence for  $p$  favours  $p$  or my judging that  $p$ . The same would be true if adopting a practice of judging on the basis of evidence were itself to be grounded on the promotion of well-being. So, as far as my popularity

is concerned, what should I believe? That I am not popular. And what should I judge? That I am popular.

I have already said that normative reasons—reasons *for* action—are a subclass of practical reasons.<sup>1</sup> In particular they are to be distinguished from reasons *why* an action is performed or *explanatory* reasons. Explanatory reasons can be further subdivided into *motivating* reasons and *non-motivating* reasons. Motivating reasons might be my desire for a beer and my belief that there is a beer in the fridge, both of which may play a significant role in explaining my going to the fridge. Often I shall be able to avow these as explanatory motivating reasons to myself (so we might then call them ‘*avowable* motivating reasons’),<sup>2</sup> but this is not always so, as for instance in the case of unconscious desires. Perhaps the explanation of my going to the fridge is an unconscious desire to be like my mother, whom I often imagine working in the kitchen. Or perhaps it is something more straightforward: a desire for relief from the tedium of the administrative paper I am reading. Some explanatory reasons, however, are only quite indirectly related to motivation, and serve to account for actions understood as mere events. My having had an especially salty lunch might be such a reason, or even the fact that God did not strike me dead as I rose from my chair.

The reasons which are a fundamental concern of practical ethics, however, are a different matter. A normative reason is a property of an action that counts,<sup>3</sup> for the agent,<sup>4</sup> in favour of its performance by that agent.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following case.

<sup>1</sup> Much recent literature has provided helpful resources for categorizing reasons. See e.g. Norman, *Reasons for Action*; Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*; Smith, ‘The Humean Theory of Motivation’; Parfit, ‘Reasons and Motivation’; Skorupski, ‘Reasons and Reason’; Dancy, *Practical Reality*, ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> I may explain my going to the fridge by giving the content of my belief (‘There’s a beer in there’). But what really explains my action (as opposed to my having this belief) is my belief.

<sup>3</sup> One might say, if speaking of possible or future actions, ‘would count’.

<sup>4</sup> The relativity to the agent in the definition is to allow for properties that may count *for some other agent* in favour of the performance of an action. If egoism is true, the property of some action of yours that it benefits me may be a property that, for me, counts in favour of your performing that action. But it does not count for you, and is not a reason. Note that I am seeking here to explicate the fundamental normative notion of *favouring*. For some property to count in favour in this sense does not mean that the agent’s own well-being will be furthered, or that the agent is aware of the property or its normative significance. So the inclusion of the phrase is no concession to any kind of motivational internalism.

<sup>5</sup> To use a phrase of Hurley’s, ‘the space of reasons is the space of action’ (‘Animal Action in the Space of Reasons’, 231; cf. Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, 95). I prefer

*Two Buttons.* You are faced with a choice between two buttons, marked 1 and 2. If you push button 1, you will receive a painful electric shock for several seconds. If you push button 2, you will receive a million pounds. You know of the two outcomes, but do not know which button will produce which outcome, and have no way of knowing. Your view is that it is well worth taking the risk of the shock for the chance of obtaining the money, and it is indeed the case that receiving the money would be better for you overall than receiving the shock would be bad for you.

It will seem to you that you have a strong normative reason for pushing the button that will produce the million pounds, and that is indeed how things are. That button is button 2, so it follows that you have a strong normative reason for pushing button 2. You do not know that, but the best understanding of the ascription of normative reasons to agents is that it takes place within a referentially transparent context. The property of pushing button 2 that it will result in your being a million pounds richer is a non-ultimate reason for doing so. It has this status only, or partly, because being a million pounds richer will promote your well-being. The property of pushing button 2 that it will promote your well-being overall, that is to say, is an ultimate reason for pushing it.

The distinction between reasons why an action is performed and the reasons for its performance is now fairly standard in the literature. But *Two Buttons* illustrates that there is another distinction lurking here which it is important to tease out, between the normative reasons which *ground* actions and the reasons which *justify* agents in performing them. Your normative reason for pushing button 2 is that it will promote your well-being to do so. This is what *counts* in favour of your pushing 2. But what counts in favour need not *speak* in favour: in *Two Buttons*, your reason for pushing 2 is, though not lessened in force, nevertheless 'silenced' by the fact that you have no epistemic access to it. Your justification for pushing 2 can appeal only to the fact that pushing it gives you a good chance of promoting your well-being. We may now ask whether you have any normative reason to act on norms such as

to cough my definition in terms of a property rather than a fact (e.g. that the action has a certain property, or has certain consequences) because I find the notion of a property more ontologically central and slightly less obscure than that of a fact. But not much hangs on this. For a recent example of the standard view of reasons as facts that favour, see Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, 32.

this, a question analogous to the question whether we have practical reasons to adhere to epistemic norms. Whatever view we take of the autonomy or otherwise of epistemic reasons, it seems most plausible that in the case of practical reasons normative reasons for adherence to justificatory norms depend only on the consequences for well-being of acting on those norms. It may at first sight appear to you that you have a normative reason to push button 1 of the same strength as your reason to push button 2, because your justification for pushing either is equally good. But if you reflect on the very nature of justification, deliberation, and action, you may adopt an external perspective and recognize that having a justification for some action is not in fact an ‘extra’ normative reason for performing it. Your normative reason for pushing button 2 is that it will promote your well-being. Your having a justification for doing so cannot add anything to the weight of that reason, since justification and normativity are independent of one another. But they are of course related, in the sense that justification will be against a background of generally accepted normative reasons.

Consider another example: instrumental rationality. If you have adopted some end E, it is plausible to claim that you have a reason either to take the necessary means M to that end, or to abandon E.<sup>6</sup> There is a practical inconsistency in refusing to adopt M while holding to E. But now consider the case in the light of welfarism about reasons, and the question is whether either pursuing M or giving up E is, other things being equal, the strategy that will best promote your well-being. It may be that neither of them is, and that your well-being will be most effectively promoted by your continuing to be practically inconsistent. The means–end principle, then, is itself a justificatory norm, the ultimate reasons for adopting and conforming to which depend on well-being.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Broome, ‘Practical Reasoning’, sects. 5–6.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction I have drawn between grounding and justifying reasons is structurally similar to that drawn between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ wrongness. In his discussion of that latter distinction (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 42–3), Gibbard claims that the objective sense is the less useful one. That seems to me an exaggeration. In the case of *Two Buttons* it would indeed be rather unhelpful for me to advise you to push the button that will give you the million pounds. What you are interested in will be the justificatory norms for situations such as these. But if we are considering which justificatory norms to adopt, then the issue of which grounding reasons we have must be resolved. What I am advocating is a ‘consequentialist’ theory of justificatory norms, as opposed to a ‘deontological’ one which gives them, or their adoption, weight independent of the ‘consequences’ of their adoption. (The term ‘consequentialism’, though now standard, is



The phenomenology of deliberation and reflection on the past perhaps brings out especially clearly the relationship between norms of justification on the one hand and normative reasons on the other. Faced with *Two Buttons*, as I have said, it will seem to you that there is some independent normative reason attaching to the pushing of one of the buttons, and you will do all you can to work out which button it is. If you push button 1, then you will see immediately that you had no normative reason to do that, whereas you did have a strong normative reason for pushing 2.

In *Two Buttons*, your normative reason cannot explain your pushing button 2 rather than button 1, though you do have that reason.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the presence of a normative reason can help to explain an action. Imagine that a serious hurricane is forecast to hit my home town tonight, and inhabitants of the area have been advised to leave. My leaving town may be explained, at least in part, by my belief that I have a reason to promote my own well-being, and one obvious way to explain my having that belief is that there is indeed such a reason and that I am, like many people, aware of it. In recent years, however, it has become common to assume that normative reasons *must*, in some sense, be potentially explanatory. The best-known statement of such a view is that of Williams.<sup>9</sup> Williams outlines two different interpretations of the sentence 'A has a reason to  $\phi$ '. On the so-called 'internal' interpretation, the sentence implies that A has some motive which will be furthered by his  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>10</sup> Williams understands 'motive' quite broadly, in terms of what he calls the agent's 'subjective motivational set', which can include 'such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects'. On the 'external' interpretation, however, the sentence will not be falsified by the absence of an appropriate motive.

unfortunate, in that consequentialism as most now understand it may describe the very performance of some action as itself a 'consequence'. See my 'Deontological Ethics'.)

<sup>8</sup> Some would prefer to say that, though you do not *have* this reason, *there is* nevertheless a reason. I have no objection to that, since it merely maps the distinction between, in my sense, being aware and being unaware of a reason one has.

<sup>9</sup> 'Internal and External Reasons'; 'Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame'. Cf. Woods, 'Reasons for Action and Desire', 189; Korsgaard, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', 329.

<sup>10</sup> 'Internal and External Reasons', 101. Williams says this characterization is 'very rough'. Especially important to remember is that an internalist may allow that I have reason to  $\phi$  if I have at present no motive to  $\phi$  but such a motive would arise were I to become aware of some fact or to engage in deliberation (ibid. 103–5).

Williams rejects the external interpretation, on two grounds. The first is that it cuts the normativity of reasons free from the potential to explain:

It must be a mistake simply to separate explanatory and normative reasons. If it is true that A has a reason to  $\varphi$ , then it must be possible that he should  $\varphi$  for that reason; and if he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting. So the claim that he has a reason to  $\varphi$ —that is, the normative statement ‘He has a reason to  $\varphi$ ’—introduces the possibility of that reason being an explanation; namely, if the agent accepts that claim.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of *Two Buttons*, then, Williams could allow that you have a reason to push button 2, and a reason not to push button 1. If you knew the facts about the consequences of pushing each button, then you would be motivated in the appropriate way. But this relation between grounding and motivation is quite contingent. Imagine now that you have a generally ascetic motivational set. In this case, being informed about the consequences of each button may have no effect on your motivation. But most of us will want to say that you still have a strong reason to push button 2. What if Williams were to allow that it is a fact that asceticism is irrational? Again, it seems that connection with motivation is contingent. It may turn out that your ascetic dispositions are sufficiently strong that they prevent any self-interested motivation from arising, even though you believe that the origin of those dispositions rests on a mistake. But you still have the reason to push the button you believe yourself to have.

At this point someone may object to such ascriptions of reasons for action on grounds similar to those that motivate the so-called ‘ought implies can’ principle. According to that principle, if A ought to  $\varphi$ , then it must be the case that she can  $\varphi$ . Likewise, if A has a reason to  $\varphi$ , then it must be the case that, as Williams puts it, she can  $\varphi$  *for that reason*. But the italicized condition merely assumes what the principle itself is being used to prove. Further, even without the condition, it is not obvious that ‘oughts’ and ‘reasons’ are in the same boat. One reason that ‘ought implies can’ seems so plausible is the close relation between ‘ought’ and emotional responses such as guilt or blame. If I really cannot  $\varphi$  (and I have not negligently caused myself to be in

<sup>11</sup> ‘Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame’, 38–9.

that situation), then guilt, blame, and other such emotions seem, on their internal rationale, to be out of place.<sup>12</sup> But the notion of a reason is comprehensible quite independently of the emotions. A normative reason is a property of an action that counts, for the agent, in favour of the performance of that action by that agent. We can speak of actions which cannot in an ordinary sense be performed, such as my flying several metres through the air to avoid a charging tiger. Why can we not say that the property of that action that it would further my well-being counts in favour of it? It is of course largely irrelevant to deliberation that this is so, but grounding and justification are, as we have seen, to be kept apart.<sup>13</sup>

Williams's second argument for internalism is that the point of external reason statements is unclear.<sup>14</sup> He imagines a man who behaves badly towards his wife, but in whose motivational set there is nothing that would lead to his being nicer to her. Williams allows that we may say various things about him, such as that he is ungrateful or brutal, but asks:

what is the difference supposed to be between saying that the agent has a reason to act more considerately, and saying one of the many other things we can say to people whose behaviour does not accord with what we think it should be? As, for instance, that it would be better if they acted otherwise.

I suspect that many people might say that there is no great difference, because when they say that the man is ungrateful, or that it would be better if he acted otherwise, they mean just that he has a reason to be more grateful, or a reason to act otherwise because it would make things better overall. But now that we have at hand an account of normative reasons, there is anyway a simple answer to Williams's question. When we say that this man has a reason to be nicer to his wife, we are saying that there is something that counts, for him, in favour of his being nicer. And whether this is so or not is a matter quite independent of whether he can be moved by or even appreciate that reason.

<sup>12</sup> Though note that they can and do occur in situations such as that of the driver who, through no fault of his own, kills a child: see Williams, 'Moral Luck', 27–8. Their occurrence can be understood as part of a strategy in which agents are encouraged to take all steps to avoid ending up in such a situation.

<sup>13</sup> Against this, see Streumer, 'Reasons and Impossibility'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame', 39–40.

Why has a link between normativity and motivation appeared so plausible? One reason, noted above, is that motivation often involves beliefs about normative reasons. Another is the influence of a view of instrumental rationality based on a certain common interpretation of Hume. On this interpretation Hume suggests that the only normative reasons are ‘hypothetical’ in the sense that they ground acting so as to satisfy some independent desire. We have no reason to desire anything in particular, but once we do have a desire, then we have reasons to act so as to satisfy that desire.<sup>15</sup>

As Christine Korsgaard and others have pointed out,<sup>16</sup> whether it is Hume’s or not, this view is incoherent. It suggests that there are no reasons to act in any particular way independently of one’s desire so to act; but it then postulates just such a class of reasons to act instrumentally. The Humean can be confronted with a dilemma. Either there are categorical reasons, and there seems little justification for restricting them only to instrumental action (if I can have a reason to take the means to  $\phi$ , then why can I not have a reason to  $\phi$ ?); or there are no categorical reasons, and the theory of practical reasons turns out to be nihilist. Can you take seriously the view of someone who claims that you have no reason to do anything, and that given a choice between, say, a period of great agony and one of deep enjoyment, you have no reason to choose the latter?

In fact, the whole notion that desires ground or provide reasons is mistaken.<sup>17</sup> It is not especially implausible to suggest that any human action must involve a desire in some sense.<sup>18</sup> But welfarism about reasons suggests that it is an error to allow desire’s role in motivation to lead one into giving it a role in normativity. Desire is a mere psychological state, with no value in itself or in its fulfilment or satisfaction.<sup>19</sup> If I desire something worth having, then in ordinary cases I shall have a reason to

<sup>15</sup> See esp. *Enquiry*, app. 1; *Treatise*, 2. 3. 3, 3. 1. 1.

<sup>16</sup> ‘The Normativity of Instrumental Reason’.

<sup>17</sup> See Quinn, ‘Putting Rationality in its Place’; Parfit, ‘Reasons and Motivation’, 128; Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, 55–7; Scanlon, *What we Owe*, 41–55; Parfit, ‘Rationality and Reasons’, esp. 20–5. For the opposite view, see e.g. Chang, ‘Can Desires Provide Reasons for Action?’

<sup>18</sup> Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, 29; Smith, ‘The Humean Theory of Motivation’, 54–8.

<sup>19</sup> This claim depends on the non-desire-based hedonist account of well-being I shall defend in Ch. 4.

act so as to satisfy that desire. But that is because I will thereby obtain the worthwhile object, not because my desire will be satisfied.

## 2. REALISM ABOUT NORMATIVE REASONS

According to the account sketched above, normative reasons are properties of actions that count, for the agent, in favour of their performance. These properties are ‘real’ in the sense that they are not to be understood entirely in terms of, say, human projection or expression; indeed they may be said to attach to the actions of any agent, including those—such as certain non-human animals—who are unable to grasp them as reasons. As Korsgaard puts it, ‘Realists try to establish the normativity of ethics by arguing that values or obligations or reasons really exist.’<sup>20</sup>

This kind of realism has in recent years been attacked on two fronts—one Humean, the other Kantian. According to the Humean argument,<sup>21</sup> if normative reasons were indeed properties of actions, about which we can form beliefs, we should expect that someone might have a belief that they have some normative reason for action, and yet be quite unmoved by it, since belief is motivationally inert. In fact, however, the ‘judgement’ by some agent that she has a normative reason will necessarily motivate her to act, not in the sense that she will act in that way but in the sense that she will have *some* motivation to act in that way, which may of course be overridden by other desires or perhaps by irrational states such as weakness of will or depression. This suggests that the ‘judgement’ is better understood as some non-cognitive state such as a desire, an emotion, a commitment, or whatever. And if that is the case, then we should not assume that there is anything to ‘cognize’. The alleged belief that there is a reason to  $\varphi$  is in fact merely some kind of non-cognitive attitude towards  $\varphi$ -ing.

The view that a judgement by an agent that she has a reason to act will necessarily motivate her—so-called ‘motivational internalism’—is hard to grasp. The kind of motivation we are discussing is not, as we have seen, that which results successfully in action. Nor can the internalist

<sup>20</sup> *The Sources of Normativity*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> For a brief and especially clear account of this argument, see Smith, ‘Realism’; for further analysis and criticism, see Parfit, ‘Reasons and Motivation’, 100–9.

mean by motivation ‘felt desires’, for, as Hume himself recognized, many of our desires have no introspectible ‘feel’.<sup>22</sup> The best sense that can be given to the view involves certain counterfactual claims of the form:

Necessarily, if P judges that she has a reason to  $\varphi$ , and countervailing motivations are absent, she will  $\varphi$ .

But commitment to such a counterfactual seems an article of faith to which the internalist is drawn by a prior acceptance of internalism. Not only can we conceive of a case in which someone makes such a judgement and is not in the relevant circumstances motivated successfully to  $\varphi$ , but such cases do not seem especially mysterious unless one is already a motivational internalist. Successful motivation follows most naturally on recognition of a reason grounded in the agent’s well-being. But even here there is weakness of will. Other-regarding motivation may also fail. Imagine someone who believes, sincerely, that she has a reason to make a donation to some charity.<sup>23</sup> She is not moved by sympathy for the beneficiaries; it is just that, on her view of morality and reasons, she has a duty to assist. But she does not do so. Now imagine her to lack any possible counter-motivation to assisting—she no longer, for example, desires to keep her money for her own use. It seems possible to imagine her still not assisting, and explaining her action by saying, ‘I do believe I have a reason to help. But I haven’t been brought up to be the sort of person to care about people I don’t know, or to care whether I do what I have reason to do. I can see that I have a reason; but I’m just not moved by it’. Often, perhaps, the belief that one has a normative reason to  $\varphi$  may itself engender a desire to  $\varphi$ , and one would indeed expect such a capacity to respond to reasons to be closely linked with motivation. But—as one might expect also of such ‘distinct existences’—the relation between the belief and the desire is quite contingent.<sup>24</sup> Weakness of will, that is to say, is just that; it is not a failure to make a proper judgement.

<sup>22</sup> *Treatise*, 2. 1. 1. 3, 2. 3. 3. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Similar examples are used in defence of motivational externalism by e.g. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, 27, 46–8; Svavarsdóttir, ‘Moral Cognitivism and Motivation’, 176–8.

<sup>24</sup> Narrowing the scope of motivational internalism to a claim about rational persons (see e.g. Korsgaard, ‘Skepticism about Practical Reason’, 317; Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 61) will make it more credible, but less significant (see Svavarsdóttir, ‘Moral Cognitivism and Motivation’, 164–5). An externalist of the kind discussed in my text may allow that rationality is to be defined partly in terms of being motivated by reasons. In general I

It might be claimed that this person's lack of motivation shows that she must be using the phrase 'I have a reason' in an 'inverted commas' sense.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps what she really means is that in her society it is generally believed that people have a reason to help others, but that she herself does not accept this as a genuinely normative claim. But this view again seems to rest on a prior acceptance of motivational internalism. If we are clear on the distinction between a property's being normative on the one hand, and belief in it resulting in motivation on the other, we can allow the possibility that someone may quite sincerely believe that some property of a course of action open to her counts, for her, in favour of performing it, but not be motivated in any degree to perform that action. Human beings usually are motivated to act in accordance with what they take to be their reasons; but they may not be.<sup>26</sup>

Michael Smith has claimed that motivational externalists are unable satisfactorily to explain how, in the case of a 'good and strong-willed person', a change in motivation reliably follows a change in moral judgement.<sup>27</sup> In brief, his argument is as follows. Imagine that I am inclined to vote for the libertarian party at the next election, but you persuade me that I should vote for the social democrats. If I am a good and strong-willed person, then I shall cease being motivated to vote for the libertarians and acquire the motivation to vote for the social democrats. How is this to be explained? For the motivational internalist, there is no problem, since as a matter of conceptual necessity any sincere normative judgement brings motivation with it. The externalist, however, has to postulate some independent motivation to do the right thing, in so far as it is the right thing. That is, the good and strong-willed person's motivation is to be read *de dicto* rather than *de re*; and the problem is that this, rather than being a characteristic of a good person,

prefer to avoid the terms 'rational' and 'rationality', since they are usually understood in the light of practical norms, and these rest, contingently, on ultimate grounding reasons.

<sup>25</sup> See Hare, *The Language of Morals*, 124–5, 164–5; *Freedom and Reason*, 190; *Moral Thinking*, 24, 58.

<sup>26</sup> The evolutionary history of this particular aspect of human agency is an intriguing matter. On the face of it one might have expected humans to have evolved in accordance with motivational internalism. But perhaps weakness of will and so on are the costs of our capacity to act reflectively, a capacity which may be seen as a kind of freedom.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 71–6. Smith elaborates his argument in e.g. 'The Argument for Internalism: Reply to Miller' and 'In Defense of *The Moral Problem*: A Reply to Brink, Copp, and Sayre-McCord'. Helpful discussion and criticism can be found in e.g. Miller, 'An Objection to Smith's Argument for Internalism'; Lillehammer, 'Smith on Moral Fetishism'; Svavarsdóttir, 'Moral Cognitivism and Motivation', 194–215.

is in fact a 'fetish' or moral vice: 'Good people care non-derivatively about honesty, the weal and woe of their children and friends, the well-being of their fellows, people getting what they deserve, justice, equality, and the like, not just one thing: doing what they believe to be right, where this is read *de dicto* rather than *de re*.'<sup>28</sup>

Smith's argument faces at least two difficulties. First, caring about what is right for its own sake is not usually thought of as a vice: it is the virtue of conscientiousness or integrity.<sup>29</sup> Second, there is no reason why the externalist must accept that this is the only moral motivation of the good and strong-willed person.<sup>30</sup> As well as caring about doing the right thing, she is likely also to care about all the things on Smith's list. What the externalist will insist upon, of course, is that any motivation that follows upon any moral judgement by the good and strong-willed person concerning honesty, her friends, or whatever, is contingent.

Smith's argument is couched in the kind of moral terms that I have urged that we avoid. But it can be restated in the terminology of reasons. The externalist, then, might be committed to the claim that what explains a change in motivation in the case of the reasonable and strong-willed person is a standing motivation or disposition to respond to reasons. In this form there seems even less reason to think that this is an unfortunate implication of externalism. For in this context the most obvious way to characterize what it is to be reasonable is to attribute to the reasonable person an overarching responsiveness to reasons.

So much for the Humean argument. Before I move on to the Kantian argument, this is an appropriate point to consider Simon Blackburn's suggestion that realists face a problem in the supervenience of the non-natural (including the normative) on the natural.<sup>31</sup> Essentially, the difficulty for the realist is to explain why, though natural properties do not entail normative properties, it is constitutive of competence in the use of normative language that one recognize the constraint that it is not possible that two objects differ in normative properties without any

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> See Lillehammer, 'Smith on Moral Fetishism', 191–2.

<sup>30</sup> Svavarsdóttir, 'Moral Cognitivism and Motivation', 198–9, 206.

<sup>31</sup> See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 182–7; 'Moral Realism', 114–23; 'Supervenience Revisited'. Blackburn focuses on moral properties, but his argument carries over to the normative and evaluative in general. For useful discussion, see e.g. Dreier, 'The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism'; Zangwill, 'Moral Supervenience'; Ridge, 'Moral Non-Naturalism', sect. 6; Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 84–9.



underlying difference at the natural level.<sup>32</sup> The projectivist, Blackburn suggests, can explain this as a product of the purpose of normative language—to guide desire and choice among the natural features of the world. That practice requires stability across cases. But if, as the realist says, the purpose of such language ‘is to describe further . . . [normative] aspects of the world’, it remains entirely unexplained why obeying the supervenience constraint is constitutive of competence as a user of normative language.

What the realist must continue to insist on here is the explanatory element in the relation to normative properties of properties which are not conceptually or analytically normative. I might think, for example, that the property of some experience that it is pleasant explains why it is good for me and hence why I have a reason to pursue it, if I also accept the claims that pleasure is a constituent of well-being, and that one has a reason to promote one’s own well-being. Properly grasping synthetic a priori principles such as these requires that one see them as necessary in the sense that if they are true in one possible world then they will be true in all. Acceptance of the supervenience constraint, then, is involved in a proper grasp of the concept of a reason for action. The realist, that is to say, does not have to accept in the first place that properties which are conceptually normative and those that are conceptually non-normative but underlie or explain the normative are entirely ‘distinct existences’ in such a way that the former could vary without variation in the latter.<sup>33</sup>

From the Kantian perspective, Korsgaard provides several arguments against realism. In her book *The Sources of Normativity* she focuses on what she calls ‘the normative question’,<sup>34</sup> asked of morality in particular, of what justifies the claims morality makes on us, ‘whether there is really *anything* I must do, and if so whether it is *this*’ (9–10, 34). In the previous chapter, I suggested that the normative question asked specifically of morality should be answered negatively. Moral requirements are not, in themselves, ultimately reason-giving. But we often do have reasons, grounded in well-being, to act as morality requires. It is clear that Korsgaard is prepared to ask the same normative question in connection with this claim about reasons (20). Take a paradigmatic case of a self-interested reason. You are given a choice between two, and only

<sup>32</sup> ‘Supervenience Revisited’, 137.

<sup>33</sup> Dreier, ‘The Supervenience Argument’, 18; Ridge, ‘Moral Non-Naturalism’, sect. 6, para. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Sources*, lect. 1. References in the text in this section are to this work.

two, options: an hour of torture, or an hour listening to some enjoyable music. Nothing hinges on your choice except what happens to you in the next hour. So the normative question is: Is there really anything you have a reason to do here, and is it to choose the hour of music? And the realist answer is, of course, 'Yes'.

Korsgaard's first objection to realism we might call the *fiat argument* (33–4). If someone claims that we have a reason to act in some way or other, we can, Korsgaard notes, keep asking 'Why?' questions, apparently without end. Thus:

You: Why do I have a reason to choose the music rather than the torture?

Me: Because the music's enjoyable, while the torture will be agonizing.

You: But why do I have a reason to choose what's enjoyable over what's agonizing?

Me: Because enjoyment is good for you, and suffering bad for you.

This exchange is indeed somewhat bizarre, but that is primarily because we think it obvious why one has a reason to choose enjoyment over suffering. It does not seem that another 'Why?' question is appropriate. But in claiming that the 'Why?' questions have been brought to an end, I open myself to Korsgaard's objection that the realist brings this kind of 'regress to an end by fiat: he declares that some things are *intrinsically* normative... The very nature of these intrinsically normative entities is supposed to forbid further questioning.'

The term 'entity' is not intended by Korsgaard to have any especially heavy metaphysical connotations. Later in her lectures, for example, she allows that what Kant calls a 'maxim' is an entity. So it is not the realist's metaphysics which Korsgaard finds unpalatable. One worry appears to be that the realist claim that there are ultimate normative reasons is in some way arbitrary or unreflective: 'Having discovered that he needs an unconditional answer, the realist straightaway concludes that he has found one.'

Some realists may be unreflective, but presumably so may non-realists. The charge of arbitrariness is also hard to understand. If the dialogue continues with your asking the question 'Why do I have a reason to promote what's good for me?', I confess that all I can say is 'Well, you just *do*'. But that is not because I have not already given you the best and final answer available. Nor is it that I cannot imagine someone's asking such a question. A nihilist about reasons, for example, may sensibly ask

it, or a Christian who thinks that one should be concerned only for others and never for oneself. But at this point we seem to have reached philosophical bedrock.

Korsgaard goes on to compare the realist position to a version of the cosmological argument for the existence of God, according to which God must exist because the only way we can explain the existence of contingent things is by postulating a being which exists necessarily. Korsgaard notes two problems with this argument. First, the cosmologist's placing of necessity in God amounts merely to placing it where the cosmologist wanted to find it. Second, the cosmologist has to assume that the existence of contingent beings must in a sense be necessary, in the sense that there must be some explanation showing why they *must* have existed. And, she continues:

Moral realism is like that. Having discovered that obligation cannot exist unless there are actions which it is necessary to do, the realist concludes that there are such actions, and that they are the very ones we have always thought were necessary, the traditional moral duties. And the same two problems exist. The realist like the cosmologist places the necessity where he wanted to find it. And the argument cannot even get started, unless you assume that there are some actions which it is necessary to do. But when the normative question is raised, these are the exact points that are in contention—whether there is really *anything* I must do, and if so whether it is *this*. So it is a little hard to see how realism can help.

These arguments can be adapted so that they apply to realism about normative reasons. The first appears to be related to the charge of unreflectiveness, and concerns the realist's methodology. Take the example of the reason to promote one's own well-being. The objection is that the realist recognizes that there cannot be such a reason unless there are normative reasons to act in some way or other; she then concludes that there are such reasons, and indeed one of them is to promote one's own well-being.

It is clear that, if this is indeed the realist's argument, it is invalid. Korsgaard does not make reference to any particular realist here, so it may be that she believes that any realist must argue in this way. But a form of realism which begins by reflection on cases such as that of the choice between torture and music, then moves on the basis of that reflection to the view that there is a normative reason to promote one's own well-being, and thus answers the normative question in the affirmative, cannot be accused of any logical error. All that Korsgaard can say is that it is a mistake to believe—just on the basis of reflection

on the case in question—that there is a reason to choose music over torture, and that one needs further (Kantian) argument to support that claim. Again we have reached bedrock, but it might be worth recording that when I have described this case to non-philosophers and asked the normative question, everyone turns out to be a realist. Anyway, this analysis of the realist position also deals with an adapted version of Korsgaard's second argument in the passage above. The realist does not begin by assuming that there are certain actions we have reason to do, but arrives at that conclusion by reflection on certain cases.

Korsgaard is not a nihilist about reasons, and I now want to suggest that, since the only alternative to the kind of realism Korsgaard criticizes is nihilism, Korsgaard is herself a realist. She admits that she is a *procedural* realist, in the sense that she believes there are correct and incorrect ways to answer moral questions (or, presumably, questions about reasons), but denies *substantive* realism, 'the view that there are answers to moral questions *because* there are moral facts or truths, which those questions ask *about*' (35). She elaborates as follows on the difference between the two views:

procedural realism does not require the existence of intrinsically normative entities, either for morality or for any other kind of normative claim. It is consistent with the view that moral conclusions are the dictates of practical reason, or the projections of human sentiments, or the results of some constructive procedure like the argument from John Rawls's original position.

Procedural realists, then, may advocate the existence of intrinsically normative entities (indeed Korsgaard says that substantive realism is a version of procedural realism), but they need not. The kind of procedural realism Korsgaard herself advocates is meant to be an alternative to both substantive realism and nihilism. But those latter two positions occupy all the available territory—there is no third alternative. Take the question 'Should I  $\varphi$ ?' According to the substantive realist, as understood by Korsgaard, this question may in some cases be answered straightforwardly by reference to an intrinsically normative entity (INE), namely, the fact that I should  $\varphi$ . The non-substantive procedural realist position is more complicated. According to this position, mere reference to the fact that I should  $\varphi$  is an insufficient answer to the question whether I should. Rather we must work out the implications of a certain procedure—the application of the dictates of practical reason, of the projection of human sentiments, or of a construction. Then we may say that it is indeed a fact that I should  $\varphi$ , in the weak sense of 'fact'

that follows trivially from its being the case that the deliverance of the relevant procedure is indeed that I should  $\varphi$ .

But at this point one is entitled to ask the following question. If we allow that I should  $\varphi$  only in so far as a certain procedure has as its upshot that I should, do I have reason in the first place to act on the basis of the deliverances of the relevant procedure? Do I have reason, for example, to act in accordance with norms based on the projection of human sentiments? If the answer is affirmative, then we have an INE—a different INE from that referred to by the substantive realist, but an INE nevertheless. If the answer is negative, then we have nihilism.<sup>35</sup> Why should I act on the deliverances of some procedure if I have no reason in the first place to do so?

If the answer is affirmative, we may now expect the debate to repeat itself at this higher level. The substantive realist, it will be said, will be insisting that we have an INE—a fact that I should abide by the deliverances of the relevant procedure. But the non-substantive realist may seek to apply the same analysis here as she did originally. She may claim, for example, that I do indeed have reason to abide by the deliverances of a projective procedure, but that this claim itself is to be understood in an expressivist way, *rather than* as a response to an independent INE.<sup>36</sup> But if understanding the claim in an expressivist way itself involves *denying* the proposition that it is a fact that I have reason to abide by the procedure, saying the words ‘There is a reason to abide by the outcome of the procedure’ is insufficient to avoid nihilism. For nihilism just is that denial, whatever one’s other commitments allow one to say or to express. Essentially, an INE is nothing more than an ultimate reason, so if you deny their existence at all stages in your analysis you are committed to nihilism.

Consider now Korsgaard’s own version of non-substantive procedural realism, according to which practical conclusions are the dictates of practical reason. She illustrates that view with an interpretation of Kant’s account of the reason we have to take means to our ends:

Kant tells us that the means/end relation is normative because of a principle of practical reason which he calls the hypothetical imperative. The hypothetical

<sup>35</sup> Or the first step in an infinite regress, which I take to be practically equivalent to nihilism. See Razzik, ‘A Normative Regress Problem’.

<sup>36</sup> Compare Blackburn’s claim that moral reflection can be understood as the expression of attitudes towards structures of sensibilities; see e.g. *Spreading the Word*, 189–96; ‘Errors and the Phenomenology of Value’, 152–8; ‘How to be an Ethical Anti-Realist’.

imperative tells us that if we will an end, we have a reason to will the means to that end. This imperative, in turn, is not based on the recognition of a normative fact or truth, but simply on the nature of the will. To will an end, rather than just wishing for it or wanting it, is to set yourself to be its cause. And to set yourself to be its cause is to set yourself to take the available means to get it. So the argument goes from the nature of the rational will to a principle which describes a procedure according to which such a will must operate and from there to an application of that principle which yields a conclusion about what one has reason to do. (36)

On this view the normativity of the means–end relation is said to follow analytically from the nature of the will itself, so that there is no need to postulate the normative fact that we have a reason to take the means to our ends. But there is a prior question: Do we have a reason to do what we will? If we do, then we have here an INE—a fact about what we have reason to do. If we do not, then it is not clear how the means–end relation can inherit any normativity from the nature of the will. If I do not have reason to will some end, then how can I have reason to take means to that end?<sup>37</sup>

There is a difference between the kind of substantive realism Korsgaard is criticizing and her own. But it is merely a difference in where the ‘Why?’ questions stop. According to the version of realism I am defending, you have a reason to choose music over torture because you have an ultimate reason to promote your own well-being. According to Korsgaard’s Kantian version, you may well have a reason to promote your own well-being, but it is not ultimate. Rather your ultimate reason is to perform those actions which a certain procedure—the proper application of certain principles of practical reason—would identify as required. But this raises questions about the nature, and epistemological status, of such a procedure, which have been asked since at least the time of Hegel. Does the Kantian Categorical Imperative, for example, seem plausible because it requires actions (or rather non-actions), such as not harming others, which we already take ourselves to have reason to perform? If so, what is its function? Or, if we are to apply it quite independently of any views we may have about what we have reason to do, is that Imperative likely to issue in any specific requirement at all?

<sup>37</sup> In a later work, Korsgaard suggests that willing an end is ‘committing yourself to realizing the end . . . an essentially first-personal and normative act’ (‘Normativity of Instrumental Reason’, 245). But it is normative only in the sense that one is giving oneself a norm to follow. The question remains whether one has a reason, independent of one’s will, to follow the norms one gives oneself.

And what is to prevent its requiring actions we think we have strong reason not to perform? And behind all this remains the question: Do I have reason to adopt this procedure? An affirmative answer is a form of substantive realism, while a negative is a form of nihilism.

An implication of Korsgaard's turning out to be a substantive realist after all is that the questions she asks of substantive realists will be questions for her too. A central question she has concerns the relation between reasons and rationality:

According to . . . realism . . . there are facts, which exist independently of the person's mind, about what there is reason to do; rationality consists in conforming one's conduct to those reasons . . . The difficulty with this account in a way exists right on its surface, for the account invites the question why it is necessary to act in accordance with those reasons, and so seems to leave us in need of a reason to be rational . . . we must still explain why the person finds it *necessary* to act on those normative facts, or what it is about *her* that makes them normative *for her*. We must explain how these reasons get a grip on the agent.<sup>38</sup>

Korsgaard seems to be raising two issues here. One concerns normative reasons (the 'reason to be rational'), the other motivating reasons (how normative reasons 'get a grip' on the agent). The first issue is itself somewhat difficult to get a grip on. If I have an ultimate reason to  $\varphi$ , then—if rationality consists in conforming my conduct to that reason—I have no reason to be rational other than that ultimate reason itself. It may be that Korsgaard is here raising again the notion that realist stopping points in chains of 'Why?' questions are arbitrary. I have already expressed doubt that this need be so, and it is not clear anyway why the Kantian stopping point is any less arbitrary than any other.

Korsgaard's second issue calls for an explanation of why it is that a person finds it necessary to act on the normative fact that she has a reason to  $\varphi$ . She is correct in thinking that we should be able to offer some account of what happens when an agent's recognition of a reason motivates her to act, when it does; but what that account will be is likely to vary depending on the reason, the action, and the person in question. If we take simple self-interest, and seek an explanation of why people given the choice between music and torture will choose the former, the explanation is straightforward: they have a strong interest in avoiding suffering and pursuing enjoyment, that is, a strong interest

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 240.

in promoting their own well-being. But why, for example, people make donations to charity to benefit distant strangers is a more complicated matter and will involve some account of the way in which their moral education has shaped those dispositions that have come to constitute their character. And the issue of why someone should be motivated to guide their action by an abstract principle such as the Categorical Imperative will likewise be complicated—and indeed fascinating—but it is not one that will be any less tractable for a Kantian than accounts of motivation are for other realists.

### 3. OUGHTS AND NORMATIVE REQUIREMENTS

According to my account, normative reasons are constituted by those properties of actions which count, for the agent, in favour of their performance. When any such property is instantiated in some action, then it is a fact that there is a normative reason to perform that action. And there are also normative facts about which kinds of properties constitute reasons for action. I have been suggesting that it is a fact that, if some action promotes the agent's well-being, then the agent has an ultimate normative reason to perform that action. Of course, there may be other sources of ultimate reasons and that is something I shall come to later.

Now consider the following case. You have a day off and are considering which of three options to select. Being a rather systematic kind of person you decide to allocate scores to the enjoyment you know you will gain from each of the activities in question:

<i>Option</i>	<i>Score</i>
Staying at home	0
Walking	5
Fishing	5
Visiting the cinema	7

A positive score for some activity gives you a *pro tanto* reason—one might just say 'a reason'—for engaging in that activity. These reasons have different strengths or weights, and it is clear here that other things being equal your strongest reason is to visit the cinema. Let us assume that there are no competing reasons in this case. Then you have *overall* reason, or reason *all things considered*, to visit the cinema. The *pro tanto*—overall distinction is especially useful if there are different sources



of reasons for the same action. Imagine now that walking will enable you to deliver a package you had promised to take to someone and that you attach a score of 3 to the fulfilling of that promise. Then you have reason overall to walk. But note that the normative force of reasons lies solely in the substantive reasons themselves—that is, *pro tanto* reasons. That some action has the property of being that action which you have overall reason to perform cannot itself be an additional reason to perform it.

These two notions, of *pro tanto* and overall reason understood in the way I have described, are fundamental and along with the ultimate/non-ultimate distinction provide a comprehensive basis for a theory of normative reasons and hence for ethics. Recently John Broome has cast some doubt on this view and it is to his arguments that I turn in this section. First, I shall discuss Broome's own account of reasons, which uses the notions of 'ought' and 'explanation'. Second, I shall address the claim that not all normative reasons for action can be understood as *pro tanto* reasons. Third, I shall examine his suggestion that normativity extends beyond reasons, and that failure to recognize this has been a fault in recent discussions of reasons.

I have suggested that a reason to  $\varphi$  is some property of  $\varphi$ -ing that counts in its favour. This idea of 'counting in favour' seems simple and straightforward and something we use all the time in making decisions about what to do.<sup>39</sup> Because it is so simple, it seems to me well suited to a fundamental role in an account of normative reasons. Broome, however, takes the concepts of 'ought' and 'explain' as primitives and gives his account of normative reasons by reference to them. Take the case of your day off. Here the property 'being enjoyable' is a reason for you to engage in one or more of the outdoor activities rather than staying at home, which you will not enjoy. And if you have the time you have reason overall to walk to the river to fish. As long as we remain clear about the fact that normative weight lies only in *pro tanto* reasons,

<sup>39</sup> It might be said that it is so simple that it is unhelpful. Parfit claims that 'counts in favour of' means 'is a reason for' ('Rationality and Reasons', 18). This seems unlikely. The debate between Broome and advocates of the favouring analysis is a substantive one. Gert (*Brute Rationality*, 65) describes this conception of normative reasons as 'overly simple', because (among other things) it cannot account for the intuition that we are rationally permitted to donate to public radio rather than to a development charity, even though the reason for doing the latter is significantly stronger. I have already eschewed the language of permission and requirement, as well as that of rationality. The claim that we have stronger (far stronger) reason to donate to charity says all we need, and leaves no important practical question unanswered.

we could say that the ultimate reason for you to walk to the river is that you will by so doing maximally promote your well-being. Broome claims that in any such case:

X is the reason for you to  $\varphi$

is to be understood as

X is the reason why you ought to  $\varphi$ .

In general, in providing a philosophical account of something, one should always seek to use as few philosophical concepts as possible. Sometimes, of course, dropping or avoiding some concept might damage an account's plausibility or coherence. But that is not the case here. As Broome himself says, he is treating 'ought' as 'our ordinary, workaday, normative verb',<sup>40</sup> and in fact any such use of 'ought' can be translated into the language of reasons without loss. In the case of a *pro tanto* reason, that would give us:

X is the reason why you have a reason to  $\varphi$ .

And in the case of reason overall:

X is the reason why you have overall reason to  $\varphi$ .

Given this equivalence, may we just choose one or the other notion—*ought* or *reason*—to play a foundational role in our normative theory? There are two reasons why *ought* is less well suited to this role than *reason*. First, *ought* is more often used to speak of overall rather than *pro tanto* reasons. In the case of your day off, it sounds somewhat odd to say that you ought to go fishing, because doing so will be enjoyable. Second, as we saw in the previous chapter, *ought* imports the myth of bindingness, with its metaphors of necessity. In the case of your day off, there is no one or nothing binding you. There are merely your different degrees of enjoyment in the various activities available, and the reasons grounded in such enjoyment to act in one way or another.

Nor should we appeal to the concept of explanation in our basic account of reasons. First, because the favouring relation is so basic and straightforward, we need no further analysis in terms of explanation. Second, though there has admittedly been much more philosophical work on the notion of explanation, and it is a notion central to many areas of philosophy, the nature of explanation is philosophically highly

<sup>40</sup> 'Reasons', 32. References in the text in this section are to this work.

contested. Third, it may be that Broome is anyway not replacing the favouring relation with something more philosophically tractable, since it may be that explanations of the form

X is the reason why you ought to  $\varphi$

trade on the favouring relation. Consider, say, the enjoyableness of visiting the cinema. That does indeed explain why you have a reason to visit the cinema. But this is surely because enjoyableness favours visiting the cinema. Finally, appeal to the notion of explanation can be misleading, and here we begin to touch on the issue of whether all reasons are *pro tanto*. On the view that all reasons are *pro tanto* ('protantism'), reasons for acting in any particular case can be seen as analogous to weights in a balance, counting in favour of acting in some way or other. If we expunge the notion of *ought* from Broome's account, I would not wish to deny that the fact that walking to the river to fish will maximally promote your well-being might plausibly be said in some explanatory context to be the reason why you have a reason to do just that. But of course there may be lots of other reasons why you have that reason, such as that your boss decided to reward you for all your hard work by giving you a day off. It would be a simple mistake to think that facts such as these are themselves reasons for you to walk to the river to fish; they are merely enabling factors in your so doing. But it would equally be a mistake to think that, because these explanations do not themselves involve 'weighing', we are entitled to think that reasons are not *pro tanto*. Broome says: 'It would be a prejudice to expect normative explanations always to take a weighing form, and to consist of *pro tanto* reasons' (46). It would be more than a prejudice—it would be a simple error. But it is an error made more likely by couching one's account of reasons in terms of explanations, as well as an error that the protantist, even if she accepts Broome's explanatory account, has no need to fall into.

Note, however, that if we restrict normative explanations to those involving the favouring relation—such as the case of enjoyment and visiting the cinema—it need not be a mere prejudice to claim that one always has reason overall to act in accordance with the balance of reasons. It could be a view arrived at after reflection on the nature of reasons. Indeed it seems arguably analytic to the notion of a normative reason understood in terms of the favouring relation that one always has reason overall to act in accordance with the balance of reasons. For in any purported counter-example, such as the idea that there may be

certain rights which should never be violated so as to act in accordance with the balance of reasons, those factors themselves can be said to have a certain weight in the balance.<sup>41</sup>

Broome claims also that normativity extends beyond reasons for action. Consider the suggestion that if I intend some end then I should intend the means to that end. Broome says:

Intending an end clearly stands in some sort of normative relation to intending a means. So if the only normative relation you can think of is the relation of being a reason to, you are likely to think that intending an end is a reason to intend a means. Then your view implies that, if you intend an end, you have a reason to intend a means. (30)

Broome rightly goes on to object to such a view. If you have no reason to intend the end, then it cannot be the case that you have any reason to intend the means necessary to that end. So, he suggests, we need to speak of normative requirements rather than reasons.<sup>42</sup> When you intend an end, in other words, you are normatively required either to intend the necessary means or to drop your end.

Though Broome is correct that there is no reason to intend means to an end merely because that end is intended, his introduction of the notion of *requirement* is objectionable for the same sorts of reasons as was his use of *ought*.<sup>43</sup> There is no one or nothing doing any requiring in the case of means and ends. Broome believes that restricting normative talk to reasons alone is likely to cause us to miss distinctions such as the one he so clearly identifies between narrow- and wide-scope *oughts*. But since a normative requirement is itself a kind of reason, I cannot myself see how using that term will do anything more than add to any existing confusion. The narrow-/wide-scope distinction is important, but the notion of reasons does not obscure it.

Are there normative requirements? What Broome is speaking of in the means–end case is, as he has put it to me, not a reason for action so much as ‘a reason to satisfy a conditional statement’: either intend the necessary means or do not have the end in question. Are there such reasons? I am inclined to think that any there are will ride on

<sup>41</sup> There is also the question whether reasons may be incommensurable, perhaps because of incommensurability of values. Some forms of incommensurability would indeed cast doubt on the idea that the balance of reasons always either comes down on one side or remains level. But the favouring relation itself does not depend on the idea of the balance of reasons.

<sup>42</sup> See also his ‘Normative Requirements’ and ‘Practical Reasoning’.

<sup>43</sup> See Piller, ‘Normative Practical Reasoning’, 197–8.

the back of the epistemic reasons I have already allowed for earlier in this chapter. So it may be, for example, that there is an epistemic or quasi-epistemic reason not, say, to intend both to  $\varphi$  and not to  $\varphi$ , perhaps because that implies contradictory beliefs. Such norms may well be worth seeking to follow for extraneous reasons related to well-being; but they have no normative weight in themselves. I suspect that this is true of the means–end principle Broome discusses. There is no ultimate reason to adhere to it; and any normative reason one has to seek to act in accordance with it will be based on well-being (it could be argued, for example, that seeking to live up to the norm will make one a more effective promoter of one’s own well-being). For, as Broome himself allows, such norms do not in themselves provide any reasons for us to follow them; any normative reasons we have to do so must come from elsewhere.

There is a general moral to draw from this discussion of Broome. We should not assume that we need any particular apparatus for our theory of normative reasons until we have begun to spell out exactly which reasons we have and how they function. On the theory I have outlined, all that we need are the concepts of *pro tanto* and *overall* reason, to be understood in terms of the ideas of counting in favour and weighing. Introducing at the outset further concepts such as *ought*, *requirement*, *permission*, or *supererogation* is unnecessary and potentially confusing.

#### 4. REASONS AND VALUES

I have already proposed it as a ‘bedrock principle’ that any individual has an ultimate normative reason to advance their own well-being, a reason that varies in strength in proportion to the degree of such advancement. There may be other ultimate normative reasons and this is a matter I shall come to later. But any such reasons, I have suggested earlier in this chapter, must be grounded only on the promotion of well-being, either the agent’s or that of others. This claim depends on the thought that, if some action is of no benefit, there can be no reason to perform it. It is well-being—and only well-being—that gives point to what we do. Note that this view—welfarism about reasons—does not imply that well-being is the only *value*. The concepts of normative reason and of value should be kept clearly distinct.<sup>44</sup> Reasons are properties of

<sup>44</sup> See my ‘Motivation, Universality and the Good’, 188–9.

actions that count, for the agent, in favour of their performance; values are properties of any object—perhaps including actions—that make them good or valuable. Value has no direct, analytic, or conceptual link with normativity. The fact that something is good or has some other evaluative property, that is to say, does not in itself imply any particular actual or hypothetical reason to act or to respond in any other way.

One obvious implication of welfarism about reasons is that we can have no reason to act in cases where no well-being is promoted, and, since the promotion of well-being includes the diminution of what is bad for individuals, a reason against acting where nothing good for anyone results and something bad results for at least one individual.<sup>45</sup> An example of the first kind of case would be G. E. Moore's two worlds, one beautiful, the other ugly, neither of which any individual ever sees.<sup>46</sup> Moore himself appears to believe that we have a reason to bring about the first world: 'Would it not be well, in any case, to do what we could to produce it rather than the other?' I am willing to allow that the beautiful world may be better than the ugly, in so far as it contains more aesthetic value.<sup>47</sup> But I fail to see why an agent should see any reason to bring it about except in so far as some benefit might accrue to some sentient being or other—including the agent, perhaps, if the bringing about is itself enjoyable. If there is some *cost* in well-being, either to the agent or to others, in the bringing about, then there is a reason against it. And if there is neither benefit nor cost, then there is nothing to be said in favour of or against the bringing about. An example of Jonathan Glover's nicely brings out the force of the link between reasons and well-being, though, like Moore and most other writers, Glover fails to distinguish between values and reasons:

My sympathies are strongly on the side of Sidgwick here, being quite unmoved by any of the excellences of universes eternally empty of conscious life . . . . If, travelling in a train through the middle of a ten-mile railway tunnel, I saw a man leaning out of the window into the darkness, I might wonder what he was doing. If it turned out to be G. E. Moore spraying the walls of the tunnel with

<sup>45</sup> For helpful discussion and criticism of welfarism in general, see e.g. Temkin, *Inequality*, ch. 9; 'Egalitarianism Defended'.

<sup>46</sup> *Principia Ethica*, 83–5.

<sup>47</sup> In fact I am inclined to take seriously views that explain our experience of aesthetic value in functional or evolutionary terms: see e.g. Miller, *The Mating Mind*, chs. 5, 8 (ch. 9 concerns morality). Well-being—especially when hedonistically construed (see Ch. 4 below)—seems less subject to destabilization by reflection on views such as Miller's. So it may be that *all* value is best understood in welfarist terms.

paint, because painted walls are better than unpainted ones, even if no one ever sees them, I should not be able to prove him irrational. But I should not accept his offer of the use of a second paint spray, except possibly out of politeness.<sup>48</sup>

A version of the Moorean scenario in which there is a cost to at least one individual and no gain to any other illustrates the second kind of case mentioned above (imagine, plausibly enough, that in Glover's case Moore finds spraying the walls of the tunnel rather unpleasant). Another example is that of Kant's island population who decide to disperse throughout the world. Kant claims that the last murderer in prison should be executed before they leave, so as to ensure that each receives what he deserves.<sup>49</sup> Even if we allow that murder deserves a lesser punishment, Kant's strict injunction seems, from the perspective of welfarism about reasons, quite literally pointless. Nothing good for anyone can come from it, only harm, so that the desert island people have not only no reason to obey, but a strong reason to disobey. I mention this case partly to show how welfarism about reasons may affect our views about what is valuable. That is, having decided that there is nothing to be said in favour of pure retribution, we may start to doubt the status of desert as a value, independently of the various doubts cast on it in the previous chapter.

I have been arguing for a conceptual and substantive distinction between the ideas of value and of reason. Recently, however, an attempt to explain the concept of value *in terms of* that of reason has received a good deal of attention. This is the so-called 'buck-passing' account of value (BPA), defended by T. M. Scanlon.<sup>50</sup> According to Scanlon, being good 'is not a property that itself provides a reason to respond to a thing in certain ways. Rather, to be good or valuable is to have other properties that constitute such reasons' (97).

Scanlon calls this view 'the buck-passing account' since the normative 'buck' rests not with goodness but with certain lower-order properties.

<sup>48</sup> *What Sort of People should there Be?*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6. 333.

<sup>50</sup> *What we Owe*, 95–100. References in the text in this section are to this work. Dancy points out that something very close to Scanlon's account can be found in the work of A. C. Ewing, who defines the good as that which ought to be the object of a pro-attitude ('Should we Pass the Buck?', 161–3; Ewing, *The Definition of Good*, 148–9; see also Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 'The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value', 394–400). Dancy notes that both Scanlon and Ewing provide accounts of goodness in terms of reasons; but it is interesting also to observe that the idea of buck-passing can be found in Ewing's version, though he does not use that phrase (Ewing, *The Definition of Good*, 157–8).

He sets BPA in opposition to the view—attributed to Moore—that when something has the relevant lower-order properties it has the further property of being good and it is this property which gives us reasons to respond in certain ways.

I have claimed that something's being good *for* me gives me a reason to pursue that thing. Moore himself, of course, attacked the very idea of 'goodness for',<sup>51</sup> but there is no difficulty in describing as *Moorean* the view that goodness-for is what provides reasons rather than, say, the enjoyableness of some experience or other.

As far as my substantive claims about normative reasons are concerned, not a great deal hangs on the correctness or otherwise of BPA. But accepting it would require me to restate certain of my positions and would remove any appeal that attaches to welfarism about reasons resulting from the role I have given within it to goodness-for as reason-providing. And the general question of the relation between goodness, or value, and reasons for action is of obvious independent importance. So a brief assessment of BPA is not out of order at this point.

Scanlon's main argument for BPA I have previously called the *redundancy argument*.<sup>52</sup> Scanlon claims that reflection on particular cases suggests that reasons are provided not by goodness but by the lower-order properties.<sup>53</sup> For example, the fact that a resort is pleasant provides a complete explanation of the reason to visit it, and 'It is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties of goodness and value, and even less clear how these properties could provide reasons' (97).<sup>54</sup>

If goodness is redundant, however, then it is not clear why Scanlon bothers with it at all. Consider the following theory of mind. There

<sup>51</sup> *Principia Ethica*, 99–102.

<sup>52</sup> 'Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck', 81. A second argument—the *argument from pluralism*—is persuasively criticized in Stratton-Lake and Hooker, 'Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness', sect. 3.

<sup>53</sup> The fact that Scanlon mentions more than one case means that he cannot be accused of generalizing from the particular. His argument is inductive.

<sup>54</sup> It might be thought that the second clause here contains another argument in addition to the redundancy argument stated in the first clause, according to which, perhaps, there is some conceptual difficulty in allowing goodness to provide reasons. As I read Scanlon, however, both clauses are concerned with redundancy: First, even if we allow that goodness is reason-providing, what explanatory work is there left for it to do? Second, given that there is no work for it to do, how can it make sense to speak of it as reason-providing in the first place? Support for this interpretation comes from the inductive nature of the redundancy argument (see previous note). If Scanlon's argument were a priori, then he would not need to consider particular cases.



are mental properties such as that of being a belief. Beliefs are in some way constituted by lower-order properties. These properties may vary considerably, so in that sense mental properties are multiply realizable. But such mental properties and physical properties are not the whole story. There is also the higher-order property of possessing lower-order properties that realize the mental property of being a belief.

Postulating this higher-order property, however, seems unmotivated. And the same seems true of the postulation of goodness on a buck-passing view. If goodness is *just* the higher-order property of having certain lower-order reason-giving properties, then it is unclear why one should be especially interested in retaining the concept of goodness at all.<sup>55</sup>

So should we, on the basis of something like Scanlon's redundancy argument, eliminate the notion of goodness, or goodness-for, from our theories? One immediate problem with the redundancy argument is that it can be run by a Moorean in favour of goodness. Imagine that I am worn out and in dire need of a holiday, so I decide to take a trip to some resort because it will be good for me. A Moorean may claim that the fact that the trip will be good for me provides a complete explanation of the reason I have for taking it, and that 'it is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties' (97) at a lower level. It is not as if its being pleasant could *add* to the reason I already have to visit the resort based on the fact that it will be good for me.

But the very nature of reasons suggests that it is a mistake to think in terms of a 'buck', whether passed or kept, in the first place. The kind of reasons we are concerned with here are grounding reasons, reasons *for* agents to act or respond in certain ways. These reasons are to be distinguished from purely explanatory reasons, reasons *why* some action or event occurs. But grounding reasons can play their part in explanations.<sup>56</sup> In his statement of the redundancy argument Scanlon says about natural properties that they 'provide a complete explanation of the reasons we have for reacting' (97). So we can see a justification of  $\varphi$ -ing as the provision of an explanation of why one has a reason for  $\varphi$ -ing. And that explanation can be more or less complete. In the case

<sup>55</sup> Scanlon himself has claimed that he is not offering a biconditional account. That is, there may be cases in which there are reason-giving properties that do not give rise to goodness. (See my 'Value, Reasons, and the Structure of Justification', 83.) But it is then incumbent on him to say more about why only *certain* reasons give rise to goodness, and in his explanation not to appeal to any non-buck-passing conception of goodness.

<sup>56</sup> See Broome, 'Reasons', esp. 31–6.

of the resort, both the Moorean account and BPA seem incomplete. A full explanation (or ‘account’) of my reason for visiting the resort will state not only that the visit will be good for me, but in what way. And merely saying that it will be pleasant leaves out the fact, of which we can imagine someone’s being unaware, that pleasantness is a good-making property.

That this is so can be seen clearly if we return to the case of the resort. In Scanlon’s view, what provides a complete explanation of my reason for visiting is the resort’s being pleasant. But there are many kinds of pleasure, and someone might ask what kind of pleasure I hope to obtain there. My plan is to spend the morning in the funfair and the afternoons lazing on the beach, so my holiday will consist primarily in two kinds of pleasure: exhilaration and relaxation. But if we are inclined to buck-passing, then we may now ask what normative work can be done by the property of pleasantness, once the buck has been passed to those of being exhilarating and being relaxing. Questions arise at a certain point, as in any account of explanation, about the individuation of properties. But it may be that one can individuate yet further, characterizing the kind of exhilaration as, say, thrills, or even as the release of certain endorphins within the opioid circuit of the brain.<sup>57</sup> It should be clear that an attempt to base a full justification of my visit on the fact that it will release endorphins will fail unless the person to whom I am offering the justification is already aware of the relation between endorphins, thrills, exhilaration, pleasure, and the good.

What, then, is the relation of goodness to ‘lower-order’ properties? I understand the higher–lower relation here in terms of generality and specificity. Goodness is the highest-order or most general evaluative property. Though it may have contained various species, in fact it contains only one: well-being. This species can itself be understood as a genus, which might well have included several values—accomplishment, knowledge, friendship, and so on. As it happens, this genus also contains only one species: pleasantness. This, as a genus, does contain many species, as we saw in the case of the resort above. If some property is constitutive of goodness, in the sense that its instantiation will necessarily give rise to goodness, then I would describe that property as evaluative. Pleasantness, then, is an evaluative property, but so are the properties of the brain states that correlate with pleasantness. So the idea that natural properties are non-evaluative, and to be characterized as those properties

<sup>57</sup> See Phillips, ‘The Pleasure Seekers’.

that form the subject matter of the natural sciences in particular, is mistaken. As I said above, this is not to say that we cannot draw a distinction between goodness and pleasantness at the conceptual level. It is an open question whether pleasure is good in so far as someone who denies that it is does not show that she misunderstands the concept. But I myself am inclined to the view that, since pleasure is indeed good, the question at the level of properties may be considered closed.

I suspect that few will accept completely the account I have just given. Indeed all accounts of these matters, once spelled out, tend to become the particular property of a single individual. But one lesson here does seem clear—that it would be a mistake to think that an account can be given of these issues in independence from a first-order account of what is good and what we have reason to do.

## 5. WELL-BEING: MOORE AND SCANLON

As I have already mentioned, Moore is critical of the very idea of goodness-for. Interestingly, Scanlon also argues that the notion of well-being should not play a significant role in ethical theory. Any kind of welfarism, including welfarism about reasons, must therefore address their challenges.<sup>58</sup>

First, Moore. I should begin by admitting that the notion of ‘good for’ does seem puzzling. Consider a world that contains only a beautiful landscape. Leave aside any doubts you might have about whether landscapes can be good in a world without viewers and accept for the sake of argument that this landscape has aesthetic value in that world. It seems intuitively plausible to claim that the value of this world is constituted solely by the aesthetic value of the landscape. But now consider a world which contains one individual living a life that is good for them. How are we to describe the relationship between the value of this world, and the value of the life lived in it for the individual? Are we to say that the world has a value at all? How can it, if the only value it contains is ‘good for’ as opposed to just ‘good’? And yet we surely do want to say that this world is better (‘more good’) than some other empty world. Well, should we say that the world is good, and is so because of the good it contains ‘for’ the individual? This fails to capture

<sup>58</sup> Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 98–9; Scanlon, *What we Owe*, ch. 3.

the idea that there is nothing of value in this world other than what is good for the individual.

Thoughts such as these led Moore to object to the very idea of ‘good for’. Moore argued that the notion of ‘my own good’, which he saw as equivalent to ‘what is good for me’, makes no sense. When I speak of, say, pleasure as what is good for me, he claimed, I can mean only either that the pleasure I get is good, or that my getting it is good. Nothing is added by saying that the pleasure constitutes my good, or is good for me.

The distinctions I drew between different categories of value above, however, show that Moore’s analysis of my claim that my own good consists in pleasure is too narrow. Indeed Moore’s argument rests on the very assumption that it seeks to prove: that only the notion of ‘good’ is necessary to make all the evaluative judgements we might wish to make. The claim that it is good that I get pleasure is analogous to the claim that the world containing the landscape is good. It is, so to speak, ‘impersonal’, and leaves out of account the special feature of the value of well-being: that it is good for individuals.

One way to respond both to Moore’s challenge, and to the puzzles above, is to try, when appropriate, to do without the notion of ‘good’ and make do with ‘good for’, alongside the separate and non-evaluative notion of reasons for action. Thus the world containing the single individual with a life worth living might be said not to be good per se, but merely to contain a life that is good for that individual. And this fact may give us a reason to bring about such a world, given the opportunity. This position, though coherent, strikes me as potentially misleading. Preferable would be to allow us to attribute goodness to a world, making it clear that, though it is permissible to speak of a world’s being made valuable by the presence of well-being within it, the goodness of that world is nothing over and above the goodness for the individual or individuals in question.<sup>59</sup> And a welfarist about value and reasons will want to add that it is only ‘goodness for’ or well-being which can make a world good or ground reasons for action.

<sup>59</sup> See Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, 14–15. Thomson herself rejects the notion as it is understood by consequentialists on the ground that it licenses one to harm others if the loss to them is less than the gain to oneself. I consider this problem in Sect. 5.2. Thomson goes on to reject the very idea of ‘goodness per se’, claiming that what is good is always good ‘in some way’. If that usage allows us to speak of, say, a world’s being good ‘as a world’, then there is no difficulty here for the consequentialist. If it does not, then the consequentialist can appeal to the fact that most people do not seem to find it hard to decide whether some world is good, or to compare worlds with one another.

Moore's ultimate aim in criticizing the idea of 'goodness for' was to attack egoism. Likewise, Scanlon has an ulterior motive in objecting to the notion of well-being—to attack so-called 'teleological' or end-based theories of ethics, in particular, utilitarianism, which in its standard form requires us to maximize well-being. But in both cases the critiques can be assessed independently.

One immediately odd aspect of Scanlon's position that 'well-being' is an otiose notion in ethics is that he himself seems to have a view on what well-being is.<sup>60</sup> It involves, he believes, among other things, personal relations and success in one's rational aims. But Scanlon claims that his view is not a 'theory of well-being', since a theory must explain what unifies these different elements and how they are to be compared. And, he adds, no such theory is ever likely to be available, since such matters depend so much on context.

Scanlon is, however, implicitly making a claim about what unites these values: they are all constituents of well-being, as opposed to other kinds of value, such as aesthetic or moral. Nor is it clear why Scanlon's view of well-being could not be developed so as to assist in making real-life choices between different values in one's own life.

Scanlon suggests that we often make claims about what is good in our lives without referring to the notion of well-being, and indeed that it would often be odd to do so. For example, I might say, 'I listen to Alison Krauss's music because I enjoy it', and that will be sufficient. I do not need to go on to say, 'And enjoyment adds to my well-being'. But, as emerged in the discussion of buck-passing above, this latter claim sounds peculiar only because we already *know* that enjoyment makes a person's life better for them. And in some circumstances such a claim would anyway not be odd. Consider again an argument with an ascetic, or with someone who sees no value in the experience of art or music. Further, people do use the notion of well-being in practical thinking. If someone is given the opportunity to achieve something significant which will involve considerable discomfort over several years, she may consider whether from the point of view of her own well-being the project is worth pursuing.

Scanlon argues also that the notion of well-being, if it is to be philosophically acceptable, ought to provide a 'sphere of compensation'—a context in which it makes sense to say, for example, that I am losing one good in my life for the sake of gain over my life as a whole. And, he

<sup>60</sup> The following draws upon my 'Well-Being'.

claims, there is no such sphere. For Scanlon, giving up present comfort for the sake of future health ‘feels like a sacrifice’. For his argument to go through, he must mean an uncompensated sacrifice—or at least a sacrifice understood independently of compensation. But his example does not chime with my own experience. Donating blood feels to me like a sacrifice; but when I visit the dentist, it feels to me as if I am weighing up present pains against potential future pains. Further, we can weigh up different components of well-being against one another. Consider a case in which you are offered a highly paid job, but many miles away from your friends and family.<sup>61</sup>

Scanlon denies that we need an account of well-being to understand benevolence, since we have not a general duty of benevolence, but merely duties to benefit others in specific ways, such as to relieve their pain. But from the philosophical perspective it may be quite useful to use the heading of ‘benevolence’ in order to group such duties. And again comparisons may be important. If I have several *pro tanto* duties of benevolence, not all of which can be fulfilled, I shall have to weigh up the various benefits I can provide against one another. Here the notion of well-being will again come into play.

The notion of well-being, then, remains a candidate for a significant role in an ethical theory. In this chapter, I have several times relied upon the suggestion that each of us has a reason to promote our own well-being, a reason of a strength proportionate to the degree of promotion in question. But if this is a practical truth, or if there are other practical truths, how do we, or can we, know them? The following chapter attempts to answer this question.

<sup>61</sup> A hedonist, of course, will claim that these components should be seen as different sources of pleasure.