CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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Philosophical reflection on practical reason and practical rationality is expanding in all directions. The work being done under these headings has become so broad and diverse that it is difficult to say much useful about the whole area. We will not try. Rather we shall pick a few points of entry into the discussions and try to situate some of the chapters in this volume within these frameworks.

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL RATIONALITY

Normative reasons are facts that count in favor of doing some action, believing some claim, or having some attitude or emotion. Rationality refers to a capacity to recognize and respond appropriately to these facts (or one's take on these facts). There can be more or less demanding standards of rationality. On a common view, a person acts rationally if she does something that, were her beliefs true, she would have sufficient reason to do. On this view, what it is rational for a person to do depends on her beliefs.[1] This brings out an important dependence of practical rationality on theoretical rationality.

It is natural to wonder how significant are the differences between practical and theoretical rationality. Recently, some philosophers have argued that the differences are not as significant as they first appear. The demands of practical rationality, they argue, can be explained in terms of the requirements of theoretical rationality.[2] A less radical view of this kind holds that certain important requirements of practical rationality can be explained in terms of the requirements of theoretical rationality, even if all of the demands of practical rationality cannot be so explained.

[1] Parfit (1997): 99. But seemingly in some cases the irrationality of the belief can affect the rationality of the action based on the belief.
[2] See, for example, Velleman (2000).

For example, a number of philosophers have recently argued that the instrumental rationality (IR) requirement, which certainly looks to be a requirement of practical rationality, is in fact best understood as a requirement of theoretical rationality.[3]

In his contribution to this volume, Michael Bratman (chapter 2) challenges this latter view, which he refers to as "cognitivism about instrumental rationality." The cognitivist about instrumental rationality seeks to show that the requirement of instrumental rationality – the requirement that if I intend an end, believe that a necessary means to the end is M, and believe that M requires that I intend M, then, barring no change to these beliefs, I must either intend M or give up the end – is an instance of the belief-closure requirement on theoretical reason. The belief-closure requirement holds that if I believe an end, and believe that the end will occur only if M, then, barring a change in either of these two beliefs, I must believe M. In response, Bratman presents a number of examples in which an agent satisfies the belief-closure requirement, but fails to satisfy the instrumental rationality requirement. These examples suggest that the instrumental rationality requirement demands more than consistency between beliefs. Bratman concludes that it is best understood as an internal norm that applies to planning agents, a norm that agents need to be guided by if they are to successfully coordinate and control action.

Means-end and belief-closure requirements are demands of rationality. An adequate understanding of the differences between theoretical rationality and practical rationality plainly requires an understanding of the nature and differences between reasons for action and reasons for belief. Joseph Raz discusses some of these differences in his contribution to this volume (chapter 3). Reasons for belief, in one sense, can be practical reasons. Suppose one will be given a large sum of money if one believes that the Red Sox will win the next World Series. Then one will have a practical reason to acquire this belief. But reasons for belief, on a more standard understanding, refer to considerations that are truth-related. If some consideration counts in favor of the truth of a belief, then it is a reason for that belief. Raz refers to these truth-related reasons for belief as epistemic reasons. He then discusses the differences between reasons for action and epistemic reasons, perhaps the most basic of which is that epistemic reasons, unlike reasons for action, are not related to values. As

[3] See Harman (1976); Wallace (2001); Setiya (2007).

Raz explains, it is not the case that having true beliefs is always of value or that having false beliefs is always of disvalue. Much of Raz's essay is concerned with exploring the implications of the idea that epistemic reasons are not value-related. They form part of a class of reasons which Raz terms "adaptive." These are reasons to have attitudes that are appropriate in the sense that they track how things are.

The distinction between practical and adaptive reasons, Raz claims, has important consequences. It shows that normativity cannot be explained by value. Adaptive reasons for an attitude are normative reasons, but they are unrelated to value. It also illuminates the contrast between practical and epistemic reasons. A practical reason to have a belief is not a reason that can be followed. It is, in Raz's terms, a non-standard reason. By contrast, an epistemic reason is an adaptive reason and one that can be followed. A so-called conflict between a practical reason to believe p and an epistemic reason to believe not p is not a genuine conflict. The two kinds of reason do not compete. If an agent follows the reasons that apply to her in this kind of case, then the epistemic reason will win out. But it does not prevail because it overrides or cancels the opposing practical reason.

THE GROUNDS OF PRACTICAL REASON

Practical reasons for actions are facts that count in favor of these actions. But what, if anything, grounds these facts? A central debate in discussions of practical reason is over what makes it the case that a person has reason to do one thing and not another. We will discuss the answer to this question that is offered by subjectivism, Kantian rationalism, neo-Aristotelianism, non-metaphysical, non-reductive normative realism, non-cognitivism, and error theory. We will then situate the views of some of the contributors to this volume with respect to these positions. The positions we outline below are not by any means exhaustive. But they do sketch a map of much of the most densely occupied territory.

Subjective accounts of practical reasons are worth keeping distinct from both internalism and Kantian accounts. The thesis Stephen Darwall has labeled "existence internalism" insists on a necessary condition for a consideration to provide an agent with a reason.[4] Bernard Williams' version of internalism held that one only has a reason to o if one could

[4] Darwall (1983): 55.

arrive at a pro-attitude or motivation to ϕ via sound deliberation.[5] Since internalism specifies a necessary precondition, rather than a constitutive condition, it is compatible with the thought that the relevant desire or motivation merely tracks independently grounded facts about our reasons. Subjectivism claims that the relevant sort of rationally contingent desires grounds the correctness of claims in a normative domain. The vast majority of the most influential versions of subjectivism have held that it is an agent's radically informed desires, and not other sorts of desires, that determine that agent's reasons. Similar subjectivist accounts of well-being have also found favor.

Like subjectivists, Kantian rationalist accounts of practical reason claim that a privileged kind of non-truth-assessable attitude grounds one's reasons. Kantians unite with subjectivists in rejecting the thought that a response-independent reality grounds reasons and embrace the thought that agents confer value via their coherent attitudes. But on the Kantian view, ideal rationality significantly constrains what is desired or willed in the authoritative way and this will make the grounding desires or willings unresponsive, or only derivitatively responsive, to the contingent motivational sets of the agent. Rather the authoritative attitude will be determined by what an ideally rational and coherent agent necessarily wants. Michael Smith's admirably clear Kantian account of reasons for action, for example, maintains that convergence in the desires of all possible ideally rational agents is a prerequisite for anyone having reasons to do anything.[6] Perhaps the clearest way to see the contrast between Kantian and subjectivist accounts is in what each says about immoral ends. Kantian accounts paradigmatically maintain that desires for immoral options necessarily contain hidden contradictions or incoherencies and would not exist in ideally rational agents. Subjectivists maintain that desires for immoral options at best contingently contain self-contradictions or incoherencies and thus allow that some possible agents have good reason to behave immorally. Subjectivists and Kantians maintain that there are truths about our reasons, but that these truths are fundamentally unlike the sort that exists on the theoretical side where there are pre-existing facts and these facts – barring special cases such as theoretical facts about an agent's psychology – are not made true by facts about what goes on in any actual or hypothetical person's mind.[7]

[5] Williams (1981).
[6] Smith (1994).
[7] See Korsgaard (1996b).

Neo-Aristotelian accounts diverge from Kantian accounts by allowing that our reasons, even our moral reasons, are generated by contingent features of agency. However these views also diverge from subjectivism as they maintain that the contingent features of agency that ground (at least an important class of) reasons are not the agent's desires but rather her species membership or life-form. Such views derive inspiration from Aristotle's function argument which held that we should look to the nature of the kind of thing we are assessing to understand how it ought to be.[8]

Non-reductive normative realists, on the other hand, maintain that there are *sui generis* normative facts which set standards for what we ought to want and do in something like the way facts about the external world determine what we ought to believe. This view need not accept the Platonist claim that such *sui generis* facts exist in some non-spatiotemporal realm.[9] Yet, just as facts about the properties of flowers are not made true by anyone thinking something, so facts about our reasons have the same sort of independence from our take on the situation.[10] Such a view need not deny that some of our reasons for action have subjective conditions.[11] The view is non-reductive in that it maintains that the normative is not reducible to non-normative facts. T.M. Scanlon writes that "the judgment that such a proposition would, if it were true . . ., . . . be a *good* reason for some action or belief contains an element of normative force which resists identification with any proposition about the natural world."[12]

Contemporary expressivism has its origin in emotivism. As originally developed, emotivism was a thesis about morality, not all of the normative. Emotivists combined two conceptually distinct thoughts: (1) that moral claims are not truth-apt and (2) that moral claims give vent to a non-cognitive attitude. Some of the pressures towards emotivism seem limited to the moral case while other such pressures press outward to encompass the whole of the normative. Contemporary expressivists have tended to expand the thesis to include the whole of the normative.[13] And they have found claim (1) above more negotiable so long as it is conceded that a normative claim is primarily to be understood to be expressing a conative attitude. Realists, too, have found that (1) and (2) above need not

[8] See Foot (2001): 2–3. See also Hursthouse (1999); Thompson (1995).
[9] The label for this position we take from Parfit (2001): 17–39. See also Parfit (forthcoming).
[10] Shafer-Landau (2003).
[11] See Scanlon (1998, 2002).
[12] Scanlon (1998): 57.
[13] See, among others, Gibbard (1990).

form a bundle and have argued that their position is compatible with (2) above suitably understood.[14]

Error theorists, such as J.L. Mackie who first introduced the view, remind us that it is one thing to understand the central presuppositions of a discourse – what would have to be true for that discourse to be in good order – and another thing to vindicate those presuppositions.[15] Error theorists argue that nothing can live up to the strong presuppositions involved in moral discourse. For example, if it were thought that to live up to the term "morality" something had to move all rational agents regardless of their desires, and one held that what rationally moves one is a function of one's rationally contingent desires, then one might conclude that moral claims are an attempt to describe the way the world is, but systematically fail to do so accurately. So nothing can meet the high standards that would have to be met for something to be a genuine moral requirement. Positive moral claims are truth-apt, but they are never true. Positive moral assertions, according to error theorists, are all false. Some motivations for error theory would limit the thesis, as Mackie did, to moral discourse. Others suggest that extending the view to cover the whole of normative reasons discourse is a live possibility. Again think of Smith, who maintains that if there is not convergence in the desires ideally rational agents would have, as he allows may be the case, all positive normative reasons claims would be false.

Philip Clark (chapter 10) aims to highlight the force of Mackie's original argument for being an error theorist about morality and to demonstrate that this argument is immune to prevalent objections to it. For example, many have thought that Mackie's argument must controversially assume judgment internalism about moral judgments. Clark argues that Mackie's case can be re-stated without this assumption and still remain quite forceful. Clark argues that Mackie could accept the possibility of amoralists – those who make sincere moral judgments but are not moved by them, thus rejecting judgment internalism. Mackie's good point would then be that moralists – those who think that morality does necessarily provide reasons regardless of one's desires – have a false view. And this view is false for the reason Mackie originally outlined, namely that there are no objective values that we all ought to promote regardless of our desires. So, Clark argues, if Mackie has made a good case against objective values, his error theory about the moral point of view is

[14] See, for example, Copp (2001).
[15] Mackie (1977).

in good order without needing the strong assumption of judgment internalism.

Michael Ridge's essay (chapter 11) is an instance of the recent trend of expressivists pressing outward the scope of their thesis beyond the moral. His chapter also follows the recent pattern of realists and expressivists attempting to help themselves to their opponent's good points while still maintaining the boundaries of their respective positions enough so that the positions remain importantly distinct. Ridge hopes to show how the expressivist can continue to say that normative claims centrally express a conative attitude of approval or disapproval, but also express a belief. Ridge hopes to show how these thoughts can peacefully co-exist in a way that vindicates expressivism over realism without marrying the fortunes of expressivism to deflationism about truth. Ridge finds that differentiating senses of what counts as a belief helps us see how this fancy trick can be pulled off.

Ruth Chang's essay (chapter 12) explores the prospects for maintaining that there are fundamentally different sources of our reasons. She maintains that none of the traditional accounts of reason offers a story which can plausibly account for all of our reasons. Chang maintains that, take what fundamental account of reasons you like, when reasons of that type run out we are frequently capable of giving ourselves voluntarist reasons to choose one of the options that our fundamental reasons did not rule out. So subjectivism or non-reductive normative realism might provide the truth of our "given" reasons with which our voluntarist reasons cannot compete. But, she argues, we can best understand several features of our reasons if we accept that we have the power to create reasons when our given reasons run out.

PRACTICAL REASON AND MORALITY

We have been discussing the nature of practical reason in general. Several contributors to this volume address one particularly important class of practical reasons; namely, those that concern morality. Many have held that moral reasons for action are especially stringent. Moral reasons override or defeat opposing reasons for action. Others have held that moral reasons for action are incomparable with other kinds of practical reasons, such as those that concern what would best advance a person's own interests. Both of these views assume that moral reasons for action form a distinct category of reasons for action.

There are, to be sure, different ways of classifying certain reasons for action as moral reasons. These classifications depend on the context or purposes of the classifier. But the above views suggest that there is a deeper, and philosophically more important, divide between moral and non-moral reasons for action. It is an important question in the theory of practical reason whether there is any such divide; and, if there is, what best accounts for it.

Stephen Darwall argues that there is a distinctive kind of reason for acting, a kind he refers to as second-personal, that is an essential component of fundamental moral concepts, such as moral rights, moral responsibility, and moral obligation. Second-personal reasons for action, unlike other kinds of practical reasons, are conceptually linked to authoritative claims and demands. These are claims and demands that can be addressed to those to whom they apply. The appeal to second-personal reasons for acting, then, might provide a way to account for the distinctiveness of moral reasons. Of course, as Darwall allows, there can be agent-neutral reasons to bring about good states of affairs. These reasons are not second-personal. But agent-neutral reasons, if Darwall is right, cannot give rise to moral demands. Or, to put the point more precisely, agent-neutral reasons can give rise to moral demands only by also being considerations that persons can authoritatively demand that one another observe.

A natural challenge to Darwall's view holds that the authority to make claims and demands on others can be fully explained without recourse to second-personal reasons. Suppose, for example, that it is possible to explain adequately how one person could have practical authority with respect to another person without invoking second-personal reasons. This would show that the second-personal character of authority is not fundamental. It also would suggest that second-personal reasons for acting are not essential to fundamental moral concepts like authority and obligation. By so doing, it would cast doubt on the idea that second-personal reasons for action can account for the distinctive nature of moral reasons.

In his contribution to this volume, Darwall (chapter 7) attempts to turn back this challenge, focusing specifically on Raz's account of practical authority. Darwall argues that Raz's normal justification thesis either must presuppose the second-personal authority to make demands and claims on others or be understood to be not a thesis on authority at all, but rather one about preemptive reasons for action. Either way it cannot explain second-personal authority by appeal to reasons that are not second-personal.

Darwall's second-personal authority is not something that persons must earn. It is a kind of standing to make claims on others, a standing that each person has in virtue of being a person. As such, it is associated with the Kantian idea of dignity. The standing to make claims on others can explain how persons, through the exercise of their will, can change their normative standing. As Gary Watson explains in his contribution to this volume (chapter 8), the fact that persons can change the normative requirements that they are under by acts of will is initially puzzling. Normative reasons are supposed to guide the will. But how can they do this if they can be created and rescinded at will? (One might wonder if such a question could be pressed against Chang's voluntarist reasons.) Watson discusses promissory obligations in particular. If A makes a promise to B, and if B accepts the promissory offer then, by the joint exercise of their wills, the two parties will have changed the normative requirements that they are under. The possibility of this kind of normative power, Watson argues, is bound up with the moral standing that persons have, a moral standing that includes the idea that persons have the power to determine what others may permissibly do to them.

Watson argues that if the normative power to make promises is grounded in the moral standing that persons have, then this moral standing constrains the kinds of binding promises that persons can make. In particular, persons have no authority to make promises that are immoral. For this reason, an immoral promise cannot give rise to a reason to comply with it. But it does not follow that an immoral promise has no normative consequences. If one party promises to do something that it would be impermissible for him to do, then another party might innocently accept the promissory offer. She might not know, for example, that the promisor is promising to do something that he is morally forbidden to do. Here, Watson argues that the promisor cannot have a reason to carry out the promise, but he may have a reason to compensate or make amends to the other party.

FURTHER THEMES

We now review a range of further topics addressed by contributors to this volume. Normative reasons for action contrast with explanatory reasons for action. The former refer to considerations or facts that count in favor of an action, whereas the latter refer to considerations that explain why an action is performed. On the standard Humean account of action explanation, an action is a bodily movement that is caused in the right way by an

agent's desire and means-end belief. Thus, on this standard model, there are two psychological elements that figure in action explanation; namely a desire for some end and a means-end belief related to that end. Michael Smith challenges the standard model in his contribution to this volume (chapter 4). Following the lead of Carl Hempel, and taking issue with Donald Davidson, Smith argues that a third psychological element is necessary for an adequate explanation of an action. The third element is the agent's exercise of the rational capacities that he in fact possesses.

A key claim in Smith's argument is that an agent's capacity to be instrumentally rational is a matter of degree. A fully spelled-out account of action explanation must cite the exercise of the specific capacity that the agent possesses. In this way, Smith counters Davidson's argument that there is no need to posit a third psychological element because the exercise of a minimum capacity for instrumental rationality is entailed by the fact that an agent's desire and means-end belief cause his body to move in the right way. Hence, on Davidson's view, the exercise of this capacity is not an additional element in the explanation of action. However, as Smith points out, it is a fallacy to infer from the fact that a minimum capacity for instrumental rationality is necessary if an agent's desires and beliefs are to cause his body to move in the right way (Davidson's point) to the conclusion that this minimum capacity is the specific capacity that the agent actually possessed and exercised when he acted.

Action explanations seek to identify the elements that make an action an action. But if Smith is right that one of the elements is the possession and exercise of a capacity for instrumental rationality on the part of the agent, then it becomes possible to identify standards of excellence that are internal to action. Reference to these standards, while not necessary for providing an account of what makes an action an action, can be appealed to in explaining the actions of rational agents. They also can explain the sense in which an agent's action is better in the sense that it results from "a better specimen of one of its constitutive causes." As Smith leaves the matter, it is an open question how far one can go in providing explanations of actions in terms of the agent's being rational. Such explanations might include, in addition to the capacity to be fully instrumentally rational, the capacity to revise desires for ends in a rational manner. If so, Smith's argument would show that there is much less of a divide than it is commonly thought between reasons that figure in the explanation of actions by rational agents and normative reasons for action.

In their contribution to this volume (chapter 9), D'Arms and Jacobson consider the role of regret in practical reasoning. Regret has two aspects, they