

JUSTIFICATORY REASONS FOR ACTION

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ABSTRACT

Practical reasons play a central role in our everyday discourse about action and there is no major ethical theory into which the concept of reasons for action does not play a crucial role. However, the nature of reasons for acting is not well understood. The aim of the present essay is therefore to clarify the notion of justificatory reasons for action. To accomplish this, I start, after some preliminaries, from a widely shared but oversimplified model of practical reasoning. On this view, we have a reason for acting if this action is a necessary and available means to bring about one of our ends. I show that this view is mistaken. In particular, I argue that, contrary to prevailing opinion, desires do not provide an agent with justifying reasons for action. By discussing the necessary conditions for justificatory reasons, I outline an account of practical reasons that is more sophisticated and more accurate than most theories of desire-dependent reasons, neo-Humeanism included.

Keywords: practical reasons, reasons for action, instrumental reasons, reasons for acting, neo-Humeanism

You are on a mountaineering holiday in the Alps. Between the climbs you stay in a mountain hut. After a hard climb you enjoy a hot shower in the afternoon. But you can take the shower only if you switch on the geyser in the morning before you leave the hut. Since it is natural to think that if you desire some state of affairs you have a reason to do what you can to bring about that state of affairs, many writers in the field of practical reasoning, notably neo-Humeans, hold that, in the circumstances, you have a *pro tanto* reason for turning on the geyser. It turns out, as we shall see, that this is a misguided view.

In this article, I shall start from this oversimplified model of practical reasons and work it up into something more adequate by adding refinements. In this way I hope to present a more satisfying account of what it is for an agent to have a reason for acting. Before getting into the details, however, I must make some preliminary remarks.

1. Some Preliminaries

Reasons for acting play a central role in our everyday discourse about action and it can be said without exaggeration that there is no major ethical theory of any sort

into which the concept of reasons for action does not enter is some way or other. Nonetheless, the nature of reasons for acting is not well understood and since the term ‘reason’ is used in a variety of contexts meaning different things, philosophical writing is often unclear about what counts as a reason. Some terminological clarification is thus in order.

(i) It takes little familiarity with philosophical discussions of the concept of reasons for acting to know that there are competing theories of normative reasons. (In this essay, I have nothing to say about *explanatory* reasons, which we use for explanations of actions.) A common way of classifying theories of such reasons is by distinguishing those that ground reasons in the agent’s subjective valuational states and those which deny this grounding or claim that not all practical reasons need to be based on such subjective states. On the former view, the ultimate source of reasons for an agent is in the subjective valuations of that agent (Hubin 1999). This is, of course, the view of what has come to be called the neo-Humean theory of practical reason. It is fair to say, however, that this account of desire-dependent (or “internal”) reasons has attracted considerable critique from authors who deny that all normative reasons are dependent on the agent’s valuations. Searle (2001) and other so-called externalists argue that there are desire-independent reasons also.¹ I will not try to settle this dispute here. My discussion in this paper will start from a desire-dependent reason, but I wish to emphasize that this does not commit me to internalism.

(ii) Generally speaking, normative reasons for action are considerations in favour of some act.² It is, however, important to notice that we need to draw a distinction between two kinds of normative reasons. In a traditional terminology, this difference has been made by distinguishing between the notions of *there being a reason* for an agent’s acting in a certain way and an agent’s *having a reason* for acting that way (see Grice 1978).³ In current jargon, these types of normative reasons have been labelled *objective* and *subjective* reasons. In short, *subjective* reasons refer to the agent’s circumstances as he sees them. *Objective* reasons, on the other hand, apply to his circumstances as they actually are. You have an objective reason for φ -ing if φ -ing is actually a (necessary) means to one of your ends. That is to say, objective reasons depend on facts (including facts about an agent’s valuational states), while subjective reasons are commonly said to be grounded in beliefs about these facts.⁴

1 *Internalism* can be defined as the view “that an agent has a reason to x if and only if x -ing is connected, via deliberation (correctly performed) with an internal feature of the agent.” *Externalism*, on the other hand, holds “that an agent has a reason to x iff x -ing can be connected, via deliberation, with some aspect of the world which need not be, and sometimes is not, an internal feature of the agent” (Hampton 1995, 60).

2 Compare, for instance, Cohon (2000) and Parfit (1997).

3 See also Kearns and Star (2008) and Audi (2004) who calls reasons which we *have* “possessed reasons” (p. 120). Many authors blur the distinction between these notions; see, for instance, Beardman (2007), Broome (1999), and Williams (2001).

4 Compare also Audi (2001, 53-5), Schroeder (2004), and Sobel (2001). Be it noted that I do not hold that this is the only legitimate way to describe the distinction between *subjective* and *objective* reasons. For instance, Dancy (2000, 49-76) gives a different explanation.

Perhaps it is easiest to grasp this distinction by way of illustration. Since you believe that the liquid in the bottle is water, you have a *subjective* reason to drink it but, as it is actually petrol, there is no *objective* reason for drinking it (Lenman 2009, 4). My second example is in terms of the traditional terminology. Suppose Jones decides to catch the 3.05 train to London. It may be a fact that the train is going to crash resulting in the death of all passengers. And therefore there *is* a reason for Jones not to take this train. But if he has no good reason for thinking that it will crash, “and good reasons to think that by catching it he will reach London in time for an appointment, then ... it cannot be denied that he has a reason, a good reason, for catching that train” (Grice 1978, 173).

In this essay, my focus is on reasons that an agent *has* (on his *subjective* reasons). I call such reasons *justificatory reasons* because we employ them when we want to show that an agent has a justification for acting in a certain way or when we want to justify our own actions. Obviously, the fact that the train was going to crash gave Jones no justification for not taking it, but his good reasons for thinking that by catching it he will reach London in time provided him with a justification for taking it. (I shall say more about this later.) The aim of this article is now simple to state. I try to determine what is required for an agent to have a justificatory reason for acting.

(iii) Before going on to a detailed consideration of justificatory reasons, some further clarifications are called for. First, to keep things as simple as possible, I shall here mainly be concerned with reasoning *under certainty*. Reasoning is said to be under certainty if the arguer knows, at least for practical purposes, of each of his options what the outcomes of his taking it would be. Certainty is the simplest case of practical reasoning because no probabilities enter.

Second, throughout this paper, I shall confine my attention to *pro tanto* reasons. That is to say, reasons which can be overridden by counter-reasons. I have nothing to say here about reasons for acting, all things considered.

Third, practical reasoning requires a choice. If we have no choice — when we slip off the ladder or when our body is held immobile — then we do not reason what to do. This may appear so obviously true as to be hardly worth saying, but many authors seem to have overlooked this fact, and they therefore refer to “desires” or other monadic valuations when they discuss practical reasons. However, when we have to choose between different options the relevant valuations are *preferences*. They are dyadic (or comparative) valuations. I take the term ‘*a* is preferred to *b*’ to mean that the agent assigns more value to *a* than to *b*.

Fourth, although justificatory reasons count in favour of the rationality of actions, acting on such a reason is not necessarily *rational*. It can be quite irrational to act on a *pro tanto* justifying reason. An action may be irrational for a variety of reasons that

we cannot here explore. For instance, rationality requires considering options that are available. That is to say, boxing oneself in with one or two options without considering their alternatives makes a choice rationally defective. Furthermore, according to Searle (2001, 141), rationality even involves metaphysical issues such as the problem of free choice. I am thus not primarily concerned here with the agent's rationality but with the nature of his justificatory reasons.

Finally, one further point should be made clear at the outset. We need to distinguish between two related justificational notions that have been called *doxastic justification* and *situational* (or *propositional*) *justification* (see Audi 2003, 3). Roughly, *S* has doxastic justification that *p* if he believes that *p* and is justified *in* believing *p*. If *S* has situational justification for believing *p* then it is *not* implied that *S* actually believes *p*. It should be noticed that the arguments in this paper are about situational justification. I shall, for example, hold that an agent has a justificatory reason for φ -ing (where ' φ ' stands in for some verb of action or for verb phrases) only if he has a justification *for* believing that φ -ing is a necessary means for achieving one of his ends. This does, however, *not* commit me to the stronger view that the agent must justifiedly believe this. As Audi (2003, 2-3) explains, however, the two justificational notions are intimately related: "If one justifiedly believes something, one is also justified *in* believing it (hence has justification *for* believing it). But the converse does not hold: not everything we are justified *in* believing is something we *do* believe. When I look at a lawn, I am justified in believing it has more than ten blades of grass per square foot, but I would not normally have any belief about the number of blades per square foot." In short, situational justification does not imply any belief. I shall use the phrases 'having a justification *for* believing *p*', 'being justified *in* believing *p*' and 'having evidence for *p*' interchangeably. By all of them I mean, roughly, that if *S* were to believe *p* solely on the basis of his justifying evidence then *S* would justifiedly believe *p*.⁵

So far, everything in this paper has been a matter of preliminary ground clearing. Now we have to go to work on the constructive part.

2. Shaping Up

Let us return to our initial example of your mountaineering holiday. In this section, I shall discuss necessary conditions of your having a justificatory reason for switching on the geyser in the morning. Whether the conjunction of these necessary conditions is also a sufficient condition, is a question which I shall not attempt to decide here. I am inclined, however, to think that it is.

⁵ A similar explication has been given by Coffman (2006). He explains the notion of good evidence as "evidence that would render justified a belief in *p* were *S* to so believe on its basis" (p. 258). In a slightly different terminology, Audi (2001) states that a person has a situational (propositional) justification for believing *x* "if and only if the person has grounds [evidence] for it such that in virtue of believing it on the basis of them the person would be justified in so believing" (p. 243n26).

2.1 Descriptive evidence

Authors often hold, or write as if they hold, that an agent has a reason to φ if φ is a (necessary) means for achieving one of his ends. On this view, it is *facts* that generate reasons. For instance, Raz (1978) claims that “I should take this medicine because it will alleviate my pain, not because I think that it will do so” (p. 3).⁶ I think they hold this view because they either identify practical reasons with “objective” reasons,⁷ or because they blur the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” reasons.

That facts do not give you justifying reasons can easily be shown. Suppose that, unbeknownst to you, it is a fact that taking this medicine is necessary for alleviating your pain but you have no justification for believing that it is effective in your case. I think it is clear that you have then no *justificatory* reason for taking this medicine (even though there may be an *objective* reason for it), despite the fact that this is a necessary means for alleviating your pain.

Some authors hold that it is not facts but *beliefs* that generate reasons.⁸ Beardman (2007) claims that “if you have an end E, and believe that doing M is a necessary and available means to bring about E, then you have a pro tanto reason to M” (p. 257). But surely not any belief will give you a reason. If you have good evidence that M is not a means to E but you obstinately refuse to accept this evidence, then you have *no* justificatory reason to M. This point may be thought to be rather trivial and obvious, but it is worth emphasizing here because it is a common mistake to think that beliefs can generate practical reasons.

Justifying reasons require neither facts nor beliefs; they do not even require justified beliefs. What we need to have is *evidence*.⁹ If you have a justification for believing that you can only have the desired hot shower if you switch on the geyser in the morning then, I submit, you have a justification for turning it on (given that the other necessary conditions are met). That is to say, I hold that you have neither a justifying reason for performing an action if this action is in fact a necessary means for one of your ends nor when you believe that it is such a means and you do not even have such a reason if the action is actually a means *and* you believe that it is one. What is required is rather a justification for believing that this action is a means to your end. Hampton (1995) holds that also on the Humean theory of practical reason the agent must have a reason for believing that an action furthers the attainment of an end (p. 57). This interpretation has been challenged by Hubin (2001) who claims that according to the Humean view, it is facts that have the proper relation to ends which create reasons. Be that as it may, I think it is uncontroversial that an agent has a *justificatory* reason for

⁶ Other authors who hold this view include Beardman (2007), Gaus (1990), Hubin (2001), Schroeder (2007), Setiya (2007), and Williams (2001).

⁷ See, for instance, Parfit (1997) who claims that “if I believe falsely that my hotel is on fire, it may be rational for me to jump into the canal but I may not have a reason to jump” (p. 99).

⁸ Williams (2001, 78) denounces this view as “*the sub-Humean model*”, but only because the beliefs might be false (not because they might be unjustified).

⁹ Clearly, a fact need not be evidence. It can be a fact that you are going to die of heart failure if you don't stop eating trans fats, but if you have no reason for believing this then you have no evidence for it.

φ -ing only if he is justified in believing that φ -ing will further one of his ends.

2.2 Simultaneity of descriptive evidence and action

Contemporary writers on practical reason have often ignored a pervasive and important feature of practical reasoning. This is its temporal aspect. As we shall see in the remainder of this paper, justificatory reasons are time-relative. In this subsection, I am only concerned with one aspect of this time relativity, the required simultaneity of the agent's descriptive evidence (e.g., his evidence that an act is a necessary means for achieving one of his ends) and the act in question. I shall argue that an agent must have the evidence at the time when he is acting. That is to say, to have a reason for switching the geyser on, you need to have justification *in the morning* that you can have the hot shower only if you switch it on *in the morning*. More generally, if you are justified in believing that acting at a certain time (call that time, time t_0) is necessary for achieving one of your ends then you need to have this justification at t_0 .

My argument proceeds as follows: (i) Suppose that you have the justification some time before you act. Yesterday, you were told by a reliable source that you can have the hot shower only if you turn the geyser on this morning. Now a moment's reflection reveals that this did not give you a reason for switching it on *yesterday* because you had evidence that you can have the shower only if you switch it on this morning (which does not imply that you can also have it if you turned it on yesterday). Yesterday's justification did not give you a reason for switching the geyser on *this morning*, too. Today you may not be justified any longer because you have obtained evidence that the geyser is defective. (ii) Suppose you acquire the justification later. You learn only at noon that you could have had a shower if you had switched on the geyser in the morning. You can then argue that you should have switched it on at that time (such retrospective reasoning is quite common), but it is clear that you did not have a reason in the morning (at that time you had no justification) and you have no reason at noon (because you are only justified in believing that you could have taken the shower if you had switched on the geyser in the morning).

Since neither the evidence an agent has *before* acting nor his justification *after* an action was required are reason-giving, an agent must have the relevant evidence *simultaneously* with that action. I am not, of course, suggesting that an agent must not have the evidence before he acts or that he must not have it after the act was done. I rather hold that an agent needs to have the descriptive evidence *at the time of acting* and only his evidence at that time is reason-giving.

2.3 Valuational evidence

Many philosophers think it is both uncontroversial and unproblematic that "internal" reasons are based on desires. The thesis of desire-based reasons is the essence of the neo-Humean theory of practical reasons, and even many of its critics accept that some

of our reasons are grounded in our subjective valuations. For instance, Searle (2001) holds that his reason for carrying an umbrella is his desire to stay dry and his belief that if he has an umbrella he can stay dry (p. 115).¹⁰ In this subsection, I shall argue that this widely accepted view is mistaken. It is not the *fact* that an agent prefers x to y which generates a reason, but his *evidence* that he prefers x to y . In order to see why this is so, let us go through our example.

(i) Suppose that in the morning you consider turning on the geyser and that you have a so-called now-for-now preference. That is to say, you prefer *in the morning* to have a hot shower *in the morning*. It is clear that this preference is irrelevant because you hold that turning the geyser on will allow you to have a hot shower in the afternoon. But in the afternoon you may not prefer the hot shower any longer. That our valuations are changing over time is all too obvious.

It might be objected at this point that now-for-now preferences are only irrelevant in our example and similar cases. But there is a general argument, which I can only sketch here, that shows that an agent's now-for-now valuations are never reason-giving. It is logically possible that acting reverses an agent's preferences. Suppose that an agent knows that due to his unfortunate psychological constitution, whenever he prefers x to y and chooses appropriate means for achieving x , then his preference changes. He then prefers y to x . If he knows this, he has no reason for choosing the means for what he now prefers. Given his knowledge, he has rather a justifying reason for choosing the means for what he does *not* prefer.¹¹

(ii) It is, however, more likely that you have a now-for-then preference. You prefer *in the morning* that you can take a hot shower *in the afternoon*. Now, the fact that you have this preference does not provide you with a reason for acting. This can easily be seen if we assume that you know that your preference will change by the afternoon. If you prefer in the morning to take a hot shower in the afternoon and you know that in the afternoon you will want a cold shower, then you have no reason for turning the geyser on, despite your now-for-then preference in the morning.

What gives you a reason for acting, however, is your *evidence* that you will prefer a hot shower in the afternoon. Be it noted that this evidence can be reason-giving (given that the other necessary conditions are met) even if you do not prefer a hot shower in the afternoon. Suppose that in the morning you are justified in believing that you will prefer a hot shower in the afternoon but in fact, due to unexpected very hot weather, you want then a cold shower. Obviously, you have nevertheless a justification for turning the geyser on in the morning.

(iii) But maybe you have a then-for-then preference. You prefer *in the afternoon* that you take a hot shower *in the afternoon*. The fact that you have this preference is irrelevant

¹⁰ See also Lenman (2009) who claims that "the fact that smoking a cigarette is pleasurable is a perfectly real, perfectly good justifying reason to smoke insofar as smoking really is pleasurable" (p. 2). It will become clear by the end of this subsection that this view is erroneous.

¹¹ Please notice that I am assuming here that the agent is not pathological in the sense that whenever he chooses means for achieving y his preference changes again and he then prefers x . And so on, and so on.

to your deliberation in the morning if you do not have a justification (in the morning) for believing that you will want the hot shower in the afternoon. And if you have this justification, you have a reason for turning the geyser on even if you want then a cold shower.

To summarize, I have been arguing that the *fact* that an agent has a preference is neither necessary nor sufficient for his having a justificatory reason and that valuational evidence (i.e., evidence that he has a preference) is necessary for a reason. First, suppose you have evidence that you prefer a hot shower in the afternoon. You have then a reason for turning the geyser on. This shows that your preference is *not necessary* (after all, you can have this evidence even though you do in fact not prefer the hot shower in the afternoon). Second, suppose that you have evidence that you do *not* want a hot shower in the afternoon. You have then *no* reason for acting. This shows that the fact that you have a preference is *not sufficient* because you may have this evidence even though you actually want a hot shower in the afternoon. Third, assume that you have *no* reason for believing that you prefer a hot shower in the afternoon. Once again, you have then *no* reason for turning on the geyser, and this shows that valuational evidence is *necessary* for your having a reason.

This result, I think, is likely to encounter particular resistance, since it contradicts most standard theories of practical reasons, and I envisage the objection that it is counter-intuitive. After all, in our everyday practical deliberations, we refer to valuations and not evidence for valuations. We hold that we have reason to take the umbrella because we want to stay dry and not because we have a justification for believing that we want to stay dry. My reply is very simple, and runs as follows. That we need evidence is concealed in day to day deliberations because reasons, in the form in which they are commonly given, are elliptical. We seldom lay out a reason fully. For example, when someone claims that he has reason for taking the umbrella, then he knows (and therefore is justified in believing) that he wants to stay dry. There is no need to state this. However, if our valuations are not obvious, we tend to fall back on giving reasons. Suppose, for instance, that in a foreign country we have to choose between *Rigatoni Alla Siciliana* and *Orecchiette con Rapini* from a restaurant menu. We may collect information about both meals from the waiter and decide then to order, say, the former meal because we feel that we have now some evidence that we shall enjoy it more. These brief remarks are only intended to show that the main result of this subsection is not as counter-intuitive as it may appear at first sight.

2.4 Further conditions on valuational evidence

Thus far I have tried to show that justificatory reasons require that an agent is justified in believing *that* he prefers one state to another. In this subsection I shall argue that there are some further conditions that must be satisfied for an agent to have a justifying reason.

- (i) The agent must have evidence that he will not only have the preference *before* the

outcome of his prospective act occurs. The argument is as follows. First, suppose you have evidence that you will prefer a hot shower *at noon*. This evidence does not give you a reason for switching the geyser on in the morning because you have a reason for believing that this will only allow you to take the hot shower in the afternoon. Clearly, your evidence that you prefer at noon to have the shower in the afternoon does not imply that you still have this preference in the afternoon. Second, if you are justified in believing that you prefer in the afternoon to take a hot shower (in the afternoon), then, I conjecture, you have a justificatory reason (given that the other conditions are met). Third, interestingly, you may have evidence that you have the preference *later*. If you have a justification for believing that *in the evening* you will prefer that you had taken a hot shower in the afternoon, then you still have a reason for acting. I think it is clear that when you know in the morning that if you do not take a shower in the afternoon you will regret it in the evening (and therefore you will prefer that you had taken a shower in the afternoon), this gives you a reason for turning the geyser on in the morning.

(ii) The *relata* of an agent's putative preference must occur simultaneously with the outcome of his action.¹² (As I have already mentioned, preferences are dyadic valuations. If '*a* is preferred to *b*', then '*a*' and '*b*' are the *relata* of this preference relation.) Let me illustrate this requirement by returning to our example. You have a justification for believing that if you switch the geyser on in the morning you can take a hot shower in the afternoon and you are justified in believing that in the afternoon you will prefer the hot shower to a cold one. So far, so good, but you also need evidence that in the afternoon you prefer to take the shower *in the afternoon* — not earlier and not later. Suppose you have evidence that in the afternoon you will prefer that you had taken the shower at noon. Since the consequence of your act occurs in the afternoon, this evidence would not give you a reason for turning the geyser on in the morning. On the other hand, if your evidence is that in the afternoon you will want to have the shower in the evening, your evidence is also not reason-giving. This can best be seen if we assume that you know that the water will no longer be hot in the evening.

The conditions discussed in this subsection may appear so obvious as to be hardly worth saying, but it is all too easy to overlook them in our everyday reasoning.

2.5 Concurrence of the justifications

In order to have a justificatory reason, an agent must have the descriptive and valuational evidence at the same stretch of time. In so saying, I do not mean to imply that they have to begin and to end at the same time. What is required is rather that there is an interval of time when the agent has both of them. The reasons are briefly as follows:

¹² For the sake of simplicity, I assume here simultaneity of the *relata* of preferences. That is to say, I assume that if an agent prefers *x* to *y*, then *x* and *y* occur at the same interval of time. Of course, this is not always the case. After opening the window I can prefer the pleasant cool to the *previous* heat. However, since such preferences do not pose a special problem for my account, this issue will not be touched on here.

(i) Suppose the agent has the justification for his beliefs *before* he has any valuational evidence. At 5 a.m., you have a justification for believing that you can only have a hot shower in the afternoon if you turn on the geyser by 7 a.m., but only at 6 a.m. you acquire the evidence that you will want the shower at that time. Clearly, you have no reason at 5 a.m. for turning on the geyser because at that time you do not have evidence that you will want a shower; and you have no reason at 7 a.m. because, *by hypothesis*, at that time you are not any longer justified in believing that you can have the shower if you turn the geyser on by 7 o'clock.

(ii) Now assume that you have acquired the descriptive justification *after* the valuational evidence. At 5 a.m., you are justified in believing that you want the shower in the afternoon and only at 6 a.m. you have a justification for believing that you can have the shower if you turn the geyser on by 7 a.m. Once again, it is easy to see that you have no justificatory reason for acting *unless* there is a temporal interval when you have both justifications — and you have the reason only *as long as* you have both of them.

An analysis of examples given by contemporary writers on practical reasoning reveals that they often tacitly imply simultaneity of the descriptive evidence and the *valuations*. I have, however, already argued that valuations as such are not reason-giving. If I am right about this, then it is simultaneity of the two types of *justification* that is a necessary condition for practical reasons rather than simultaneity of descriptive evidence and *valuations*.

2.6 Must preferences be backed up by reasons?

Some authors, notably decision theorists, hold that if some formal conditions are met, you have a reason to φ if φ -ing is related in an appropriate way to any goal which you actually have.¹³ This, however, is in philosophy a minority opinion and many hold that you have only a reason for taking the means to an end if you have a reason to pursue that end (see Korsgaard 1997, 223).¹⁴ But also this view is not generally accepted without qualification. According to the standard Humean account of practical reasons, we need to distinguish between derivative and non-derivative (“basic”) valuations; and an agent has a reason to do what he believes would satisfy his “basic” desires. Derivative desires depend on other, more basic, valuations and beliefs of the agent; and they are only reason-giving if they are based on justified (or true) beliefs.

¹³ For example, Simon (1983) claims that “reason is wholly instrumental. It cannot tell us where to go; at best it can tell us how to get there. It is a gun for hire that can be employed in the service of any goals that we have, good or bad.” Maurice Allais, another prominent decision theorist, is quoted by Broome (1995, 104-5) as saying, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that there are no criteria for the rationality of ends as such other than the condition of consistency. Ends are completely arbitrary.” Some philosophers have endorsed this view. For instance, Bertrand Russell (1954) has held that reason “has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends,” it only requires choosing the right means “to an end that you wish to achieve” (p. 8).

¹⁴ Hubin (2001) characterizes this view as holding that “no reasons will be transmitted to the means unless there is a reason for the ends” (p. 462). See also Schroeder (2007).

It should be clear by now in which way I disagree with this Humean orthodoxy. Valuations *as such* are not reason-giving; only the evidence that we value something can provide us with justifying reasons. This raises, however, the question whether these valuations need to be justified. My answer is Humean in spirit. In this subsection, I shall argue that if an agent has reason to believe that his preference is *non-derivative* there is no need to justify it. However, if he has no such reason, then he needs to show that it is justified. I think that this latter claim is uncontroversial, and I shall therefore give only one example to illustrate it. Homer's hero Odysseus has himself tied to the mast of his ship so that he can hear the sirens' sweet song without, later, being driven to follow their seductive sound and perish. His preference to be tied on the mast was derivative. He had it *because* he believed that if he was not prevented from escaping he would follow the sirens and die. His preference was therefore in need of justification.

But there has been much dispute over the view of Humeans that *non-derivative* valuations are reason-giving despite the fact that they cannot be backed up by reasons. In what follows I shall argue that they are (*mutatis mutandis*) right. This requires (i) explaining the nature of non-derivative valuations and (ii) showing that they provide reasons despite the fact that they are not rationally criticisable. Let's consider these issues in turn.

(i) Non-derivative valuations have often been identified with *intrinsic* desires. Therefore, neo-Humeans commonly hold that the basis of an agent's reasons are his intrinsic valuations (see, e.g., Hubin 1999 and Shemmer 2004).¹⁵ However, the concept of intrinsic valuations is elusive and some clarifications are therefore called for.

There is wide (though not universal) consensus that an agent values a thing intrinsically if he values it on account of its internal properties. Some have claimed that these internal properties are non-relational properties (e.g. being spherical),¹⁶ but others have argued that *internally relational* properties – i.e., properties a thing has “in virtue of the relations it has to its own parts (components, elements, constituents, etc.)” – are also internal (see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2000, 34). If I value Mozart's piano sonata K331 on account of its celebrated *Alla turca* movement, then I value it on the basis of one of its parts, but still intrinsically.

Since we value something intrinsically if we value it in virtue of its internal properties, many authors have held that valuing *x* intrinsically is tantamount to valuing *x* for its own sake. On this view, an agent values *x* for its own sake if he values *x* in virtue of what it is *in itself*, independently of other objects.¹⁷ This has been plausibly criticised,

¹⁵ There are, however, variants of neo-Humeanism that ground an agent's reason on her values, rather than on her intrinsic desires (see Hubin 2003). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for alerting me to this.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Korsgaard (1983) who distinguishes different types of values.

¹⁷ Among the many authors who have identified intrinsic valuations with valuations for its own sake are Brandt (1969-70), Quinn (1974) and Shemmer (2004).

however, by authors who have argued that we can value a thing for its own sake if we value it on account of its relational features to *other things*.¹⁸ Let a single example serve to illustrate this. Some people value Mozart's Requiem less when they learn that much of it is the work of his pupil Süßmayr (due to Mozart's untimely death). This shows that their valuation depends on a relational property of this piece of music to another thing (its composer). It is not only valued on the basis of its internal properties and thus it is not valued intrinsically. But it has been held that a valuation of this kind is still *for its own sake*.

Be that as it may, the point to emphasize now is that *non-derivative valuations* are neither intrinsic valuations nor valuations of a thing for its own sake. Both of them are *derivative* valuations. That is to say, when we value a thing intrinsically or for its own sake, we value it *for a reason*. I may value Mozart's sonata K331 *because* I think its third movement is the *Alla turca*, and I may value his Requiem less *because* I believe that much of it was composed by his pupil. In both cases, my valuation depends on something that I believe about the valued thing. My valuations are therefore open to rational criticism and they are rationally defective if the beliefs on which they depend are unjustified.

Non-derivative valuations are different. If we value a thing non-derivatively we value it independently of the relations we believe it bears to its parts or to other objects and states of affairs. If you disvalue pain *non-derivatively* you may hold beliefs about it (e.g. that it is a symptom of a disease), but your disvaluing does *not* depend on these beliefs. It is directly based on your experience. Non-derivative valuations are therefore *non-cognitive attitudes* towards things and do not depend on our "intellectual faculties" (to borrow a term from Hume).¹⁹

(ii) At the beginning of this subsection I have said that irrational valuations are not reason-giving. Therefore, we must now deal with the question whether non-derivative valuations can be irrational. I am being brief here because the details are not important for us.

Two different argumentative strategies have been employed by philosophers to show that non-derivative valuations can be irrational. The first involves presenting arguments that are based on alternative accounts of what makes a valuation irrational – for instance, being unintelligible or being rationally arbitrary. These arguments have been convincingly refuted by Hubin (1991) and we can therefore safely ignore them here. The second line of attack is simply to describe cases where our intuitions seem to tell us that a desire is irrational. Examples of such whims and "crazy desires" are the vertiginous urge to fling yourself from the balcony (Cohon 2000, 63), the desire to

¹⁸ See Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000, 39-42) and Kagan (1998) who have argued for this, albeit in different ways.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Beardman (2007, 256), Hubin (1991, 23), and Setiya (2004, 371).

be a successful axe-murderer (Schroeder 2007, 120), a mother's sudden urge to drown her brawling child in the bath (Watson 1975, 210), the desire for pain (Audi 2004, 126), or the urge to bite a piece out of this table (Searle 2001, 132) – and this list is by no means exhaustive. These examples are, however, particularly unconvincing because the authors have never made clear that these desires are non-derivative in the sense explained above, and they do not always appreciate the fact that non-derivative valuations can only create *pro tanto* reasons, which can, of course, be defeated by other reasons available. I therefore agree with Hubin (1991; 2001) that such whims do not pose special problems for the view that non-derivative valuations are not rationally criticisable and therefore not irrational.²⁰

Non-derivative valuations are, by definition, not based on reasons. On the Humean tradition, to which I align myself here, valuations can be irrational only if the factors on which they are based are rationally defective. In other words, a rational evaluation of preferences or desires requires evaluating the reasons on which they are based. Non-derivative valuations are not based on any reasons and hence they are not rationally criticisable. We can, of course, examine the causes and consequences of such valuations but not the reasons on which they are based. There are none. Non-derivative valuations do not admit of justification and they are thus neither rational nor irrational. They are *arational*.

Let me summarize this. In this subsection I have endorsed the widely accepted view that derivative valuations are not reason-giving if they are not justified. I have then argued that non-derivative valuations are *not* irrational but arational; and in accordance with the Humean tradition, I have therefore held (but not demonstrated) that such valuations can provide reasons for acting. This does not, of course, imply that it is always rational to satisfy such valuations because they can only provide *pro tanto* reasons and such reasons are commonly defeated by other reasons.

Let us now apply these results to our example. In the morning you have evidence that you prefer in the afternoon a hot shower to a cold shower. If you think you have this preference because a hot shower will relax you, your preference is derivative and in need of justification. However, if you know that you prefer the hot shower non-derivatively (for no further reason) then it is *arational* and thus not rationally appraisable. Nonetheless, it can create a *pro tanto* reason for switching on the geyser (given that the other necessary conditions are satisfied).

²⁰ Hubin (2001) has claimed that non-derivative desires “can be instrumentally irrational in the sense that one has reason to extinguish them” (p. 457). This, I am afraid to say, is a mistake. I may have a reason to rid myself of my craving for sweets. But this does not mean that this desire is irrational. It would be irrational to *satisfy* this desire, but be it noted that this does not make the *desire* irrational. To make this clearer, let us consider another example. An introvert may have a reason to rid himself of his want to be left by himself. His desire may be *unfortunate*, but it is in no way irrational.

2.7 Warrant for logical support

Even if all necessary conditions that I have discussed thus far are satisfied, an agent does still not have a reason for acting unless he has a warrant that his descriptive and valuational evidence (taken together) logically support his action. That is to say, a set of premises of a piece of practical reasoning constitutes a justifying reason only if the reasoner is justified in believing that this set logically supports the conclusion.²¹

The *fact* that there is such a logical relationship is not reason-giving. A comparison with theoretical reasoning may help to make this clear. A student has reason for believing that a certain shape is a right triangle. This does not justify his belief that the square on this triangle's hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on its two legs – despite the fact that this is deducible from the student's evidence. Obviously, the student's evidence about the triangle provides him only with a reason for holding the conclusion if he has a justification for believing that the conclusion is deducible from his premise-belief.

This point holds in practical reasoning also. For illustration, take a simple example from non-probabilistic reasoning under uncertainty (that is, reasoning when we are facing problems that are so vague that we cannot assign probabilities). 68-year-old Mr Goldman had lost the vision in his left eye and now his right eye has deteriorated due to a cataract.²² Even with glasses, his corrected visual acuity is now only 20/50. His doctor raised the possibility of cataract surgery but was not able to estimate the chances of successful surgery (which would restore his visual acuity to 20/30). However, he was sure that unsuccessful surgery would erode his vision to 20/100. Goldman considers his two options “cataract surgery” and “no cataract surgery”. If he chooses surgery his vision may be restored to 20/30 acuity, but it can also deteriorate to 20/100 acuity. If he refuses to have surgery his vision remains at 20/50.

It is so difficult to decide whether Mr Goldman has a reason *for* surgery rather than *against* it because we do not know what conclusion is supported by the premises. According to the so-called *Maximin Principle*, we have to find for each alternative the worst outcome and then choose the option for which the worst outcome is best. Mr Goldman should therefore choose “no surgery”. On the other hand, according to the *Maximax Principle* (which requires finding the *best* outcome for each option and then choosing the action for which this best outcome is largest), Mr. Goldman's premises support undergoing cataract surgery.

²¹ This issue has been extensively discussed in epistemology. The question has been whether justification (or knowledge) is closed under entailment. Many philosophers have held that if a person is justified in believing *p* and knows (or justifiably believes) that *p* entails *q*, then he is justified in believing *q*. Be it noted that I am here not committed to this view because I only hold the *weaker* claim that if an agent is justified in believing the premises of a valid practical argument but is *not* justified in believing that these premises entail the conclusion, then he has *no* justificatory reason for preferring one action to its alternatives.

²² The example has been adapted from Hammond, J. S., Keeney, R. L., and Raiffa, H. (1999). *Smart choices*. New York: Broadway Books, pp. 131-133.

We can put the upshot of this subsection succinctly as follows: If we are not justified in believing that the premises of a piece of reasoning logically support φ -ing, then these premises do not provide a justifying reason for φ -ing.

3. Conclusion

The question I have been addressing in this paper is “What are the requirements for an agent to have a justificatory reason for acting?” The results of this investigation may be summarized as follows. You have no justificatory reason for φ -ing if you have no evidence that φ -ing is a necessary means for one of your ends (2.1), if you do not have this evidence at the time when you need to perform this action (2.2), and if you are not justified for believing that you will value the outcome of this act at the time when it occurs (2.3 and 2.4). In addition, you need to have the descriptive and valuational evidence at the same time (2.5) and your valuation needs to be justified if it is derivative (2.6). Finally, I have tried to show that it is a necessary condition for justificatory reasons that you are justified in believing that the premises of your reasoning logically support the conclusion (2.7). Returning to our example, we can therefore say that you have no justificatory reason for turning on the geyser in the morning before you leave the hut for a climb if these necessary conditions are not satisfied.

This may seem a surprising thing to say because it implies that most accounts of “desire-dependent” reasons, neo-Humeanism included, are defective. Nonetheless, I conjecture that a closer examination of the results of this study reveals that these theories are indeed misguided.

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