

REASON, REASONS, AND REASONING

by

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Abstract:

Proceduralists about practical rationality and reasons for action argue that practical rationality is only capable of criticizing our reasons for action when, through deliberation, they are reachable through our current beliefs and desires. Using this model of practical rationality, proceduralists also typically argue that the only reasons for action we have are instrumentally valuable ones. Substantivists disagree, however, and argue that practical rationality is capable of criticizing our actions despite our desires, preferences and interests. Substantivists argue that although we have instrumental reasons for action, there are also other reasons for action we have, specific non-instrumental ones, which we are required to act for on pain of irrationality. In this thesis I argue that a substantivist model of practical rationality and reasons for action is correct, and that understanding practical rationality and reasons for action in this way has surprising consequences for moral theory.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From the standpoint of deciding what to do, we might think of ourselves as typically asking the following question: what do we have reason to do? Once we consider this question, however, we see it dividing itself into other, equally important deliberative questions: are the only things we have reason to do things we want to do? Do we sometimes have reason to do things which we must do even if we do not want to? Do we have reasons to be moral?

My aim in this thesis is to give general answers to questions that concern themselves with answering what it is agents have reason to do. For questions about what we have reason to do not only pervade our everyday lives and decisions; they are also vivid throughout the entire history of philosophy, reaching back at least as far as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. Furthermore, in contemporary philosophy, understanding how - and to what extent - agents act for reasons is one of the key tasks of virtue theory, the theory of practical rationality, action theory and also, perhaps more explicitly, ethical theory. In general then, questions concerning what agents have reason to do have been given serious attention, and because of this I think that providing a satisfactory account of reasons for action is pressing and important.

Making headway on questions about what we have reason to do is very difficult. For example, understanding what we have reason to do might begin with trying to explain our actions and their relationship with the reasons we have for doing things. And a large part of explaining the relationship between acting and reasons might involve explaining the way in which agents are *motivated* to do the things they do. Yet here we might ask; is a motivating reason to do something provided by, for example, the fact that I have a desire to do something? Or is the fact that I desire to do something not enough to constitute a reason for

performing some action? And, perhaps further complicating our attempt to explain reasons for action, we might find that inquiring about motivational criteria in turn leads us to ask how we should explain the ability agents intuitively have to intentionally bring about their actions. Yet once we attempt to explain the way in which agents are capable of self-determinate action, we may then be led to asking whether not intentional action is even possible; and this might in turn lead us to wonder whether reasons and actions even exist, that is, at least in the way we typically think they do.

However, perhaps we can make headway on explaining the relationship between our reasons and our actions by turning to another aspect of practical rationality. For some philosophers contend that explaining the relationship between action and reasons involves understanding the extent to which it is possible for our actions to be *criticized* by practical rationality itself, where understanding this kind of practical criticism might involve thinking about the relationship between our reasons for action and the possibility of normative constraints. This issue of whether or not (and if so, to what extent) the ‘content’ of practical rationality is critical or not has shaped much of the debate about what agents have reason to do, and it is thinking about reasons for action in this way that I will attempt to make sense of in this thesis. Attempting to explain reasons for action through understanding the extent to which practical reason can be critical is certainly the most interesting approach one might take, especially in terms of the practical and ethical consequences it might imply. For example, if we wish to think, as many do, that practical rationality is closely related to moral deliberation, then it would be a fact of considerable importance to ethicists if it turned out that practical rationality is incapable of criticizing our reasons for action. For if our reasons for action are not criticizable, it would follow that the reasons for action we have would only seem to be constituted by what we want to do, leaving substantive moral claims quite empty.

The point, then, is that answering whether or not practical rationality can be critical of our actions might be thought of as a way of explaining, more generally, what we have reason to do.

As I see it, thinking about whether or not practical rationality can be critical of our actions and ends rests on whether we think the content of practical rationality is *procedural* or *substantive*. The literature is divided on this issue. Proceduralists typically hold that practical rationality can only ever be instrumental to satisfying our desires, preferences and perhaps interests.¹ Proceduralists hold that rationality can only be instrumental because they hold that a reason for action must, necessarily, be capable of providing us with some motivational content that in some way aims at satisfying our desires. This view about the motivational content of practical rationality and reasons for action has been called *internalism*, and it is a view that proceduralists often accept. And so, while proceduralists think practical rationality can be critical of our reasons for action, because they are usually internalists, they think that reason can only be critical of our actions in so far as our desires are concerned. Thus proceduralists offer a negative answer to the question, ‘Do we sometimes have reasons to do things we do not want to do?’ Substantivists, on the other hand answer affirmatively. In general, substantivists answer affirmatively because they argue that the aim and scope of practical rationality involves more than just the satisfaction of our desires. Substantivists claim that practical rationality is capable of criticizing our reasons for action through norms of rationality quite generally, and that sometimes we are capable of being motivated by considerations that are not directed towards satisfying our desires.

¹ I make a distinction between desires and preferences here mainly to account for difference of word choice in the literature. Talk of preferences usually takes place within decision theory literature, and talk of desires usually takes place within practical rationality and ethics literature. Aside from this distinction though, preferences might also be thought to refer to an agent’s calculated expected utility out of a choice situation, where as desires may be thought of as more general state of wanting.

What I aim to show in this thesis is that the substantivist's assessment of practical rationality and reasons for action is correct. For I claim that the task of explaining the motivational and contentful aspects of practical rationality and reasons for action involves more than limiting one's view to instrumentalist reasons for action. That the substantivist is right, however, does not mean that we do not sometimes have instrumental reasons for action; that we never have reasons that aim at satisfying our desires. Of course we have instrumental reasons for action. Indeed a great deal of what we do is justified by instrumental reasons for action. Nevertheless, in arguing that the substantivist's view of practical rationality and reasons for action is correct what I will in effect be saying is that instrumental reasons for action are not the only reasons we have for action. For sometimes, I contend, our instrumental reasons for action are trumped, constrained, and shaped by what I will go on to call *substantive reasons for action*; reasons for action we must act upon regardless of our subjective interests and desires.

My substantivist account of practical rationality and reasons for action has promising implications for morality. For, intuitively, moral reasons for action are just those reasons we must act on *regardless* of what we desire to do; they are reasons we are obligated to act on even when we do not want to. And so, I claim that the constraints of morality are best thought of through the more general constraints of practical rationality, and that moral obligation and moral impermissibility are best thought of as strands of practical obligation and practical impermissibility. I also argue, contrary to some philosophical views, that thinking of moral reasons as practical reasons provides us with a very minimalist, clean metaphysical picture of moral reasons. For thinking of moral reasons as practical reasons does not require aspiring to, for example, an independent or parallel reality of moral facts; nor does it require that agents must deliberate about what they believe a fully rational agent

would do in their situation. Rather, I will demonstrate that morality is largely encompassed by practical reasoning, and that morality is a product of the practical relations that obtain between agents deliberating about what to do. In other words, my view purports to demonstrate that morality is a relational property that exists between agents' actions and deliberations.

My substantivist account of practical rationality and reasons for action will take the following shape. I begin with two chapters in which I characterize the historical roots of the debate between substantivists and proceduralists. Chapter Two discusses Kant's substantivist approach to practical rationality. Chapter Three discusses Hume's skeptical proceduralist view. In Chapter Four I characterize the proceduralist/substantivist debate as one which largely takes place between Humean and Kantian influenced projects. After characterizing the proceduralist/substantivist debate, I then turn to a contemporary Humean view, Michael Smith's moderate proceduralism. In general, I cast Smith as an internalist about motivation, and suggest that his internalism aims to knock out substantive theories of practical rationality altogether. Chapter Five considers Christine Korsgaard's criticism of internalism which suggests that many Humeans have mistaken assumptions about internalism, thereby making room for the possibility of an internalist-substantive theory of practical rationality. In Chapter Six I then move onto showing that substantivism is the best way to conceive of the content of practical rationality and the influence it has on our reasons for action. In general, I borrow and develop R. Jay. Wallace's volitionalist claim that a theory of rational agency must tell a story about how agents are capable of guiding their actions via norms and principles of rationality. I then turn to showing that substantivism about practical rationality gives us good reasons to be moral rationalists in Chapter Seven. There I discuss influential moral rationalist accounts and suggest which features of the theory we might want to keep

and which features we might want to avoid. I then conclude in Chapter eight with some brief remarks about what I take myself to have accomplished, and what issues remain either tentatively settled or altogether outstanding.

CHAPTER 2: KANT'S SUBSTANTIVISM

2.1. Hume and Kant

Recent work on reasons for action and practical rationality has been largely shaped by two historical figures: Hume and Kant.² In this chapter I will first look at Kant's view, and in the next chapter I will turn to Hume's view.

My interests in looking to Kant's project in this chapter are to provide a starting point for eventually developing a general theory of practical rationality that is not silent with respect to the deliberative process that takes place before and when we act. For Kant's theory of practical rationality sees reason *itself* as the determining factor of how it is that agents are motivated, and it maintains that our reasons for action are not exhausted by what we happen to (want and) desire. Kant's view is also a good starting point because it allows for a unified theory in which non-instrumental reasons and instrumental reasons for action cooperate.³ According to Kant, instrumental reasons for action are both constrained and shaped by non-instrumental ones, something I will take very seriously in later chapters when developing and explaining my own view.⁴ Ultimately then, I want to use Kant as an initial

² At least in so far as my interests are concerned. I say this because many philosophers have also included Aristotle along side Hume and Kant as a third historical account of practical rationality. While I think that this is a completely justified move for some to make, here I think that it is only necessary to look at Hume and Kant's conceptions of practical rationality, leaving Aristotle's to the side. For although Aristotle's view is an interesting one and is somewhat different from the views Kant and Hume provide, for the sake of my overall project, the general theme of Aristotle's view is captured by Kant's view. This is explained well in the introduction of Ethics and Practical Rationality, Garrett Cullity & Berys Gaut, 1-27. For as Cullity and Gaut point out, one fundamental thing Aristotle and Kant share is their disagreement with Hume about the possibility of practical reason being motivational, in so far as they both take it that practical reason can be fully critical of the desires we have, providing us with reasons for action despite our desires. Thus while they point out that there is a key difference between the Aristotelian and Kantian view, namely that for Aristotle, "what makes it rational to choose an action is that it is good; it is an appropriate object of rational choice because it is good" whereas for Kantians, "the converse relation holds" (Cullity & Gaut, Ethics and Practical Reason, 13), I think that for the sake of my present interests, a thorough look at Kant's view is all that is required here.

³ Or, if one prefers using difference terminology, indeed the terminology I will use in the rest of the thesis, one can replace the former with 'substantive reasons' and the latter with 'procedural reasons'.

⁴ That is, according to Kant, practical rationality is such that our reasons for acting are informed all the way up; our subjective maxims are informed by broader hypothetical imperatives, and our hypothetical imperatives are

example because the general theme of his project and mine is the same: that of providing a view of practical rationality in which reason plays a substantial, normative role in informing and motivating us to act.

2.1.1 Why Kant?

Besides the broader reasons mentioned above, why have philosophers interested in practical rationality sought support through Kant? Many reasons immediately come to mind: Kant's attempt to construct a unified philosophical theory, Kant's attempt to solve the problem of free will, and Kant's attempt to keep a theory of ethics separate from a theory of happiness. Yet perhaps the foremost reason why so many philosophers interested in practical rationality have turned to Kant is because Kant's theory of practical rationality is not, as I have already hinted above, merely an attempt to explain what is involved in instrumental reasoning. Kant's view does not see practical rationality as simply procedural, where according to Brad Hooker and Bart Streumer, proceduralism is the view that "an agent can be open to rational criticism for lacking a desire only if the agent can rationally reach this desire from the beliefs and desires that he or she has".⁵ Kant disagrees with merely procedural accounts of practical rationality because he does not think that rational criticism is limited to our instrumental goals and aims. This makes Kant a substantivist, where substantivism is the view that "an agent can be open to rational criticism for lacking a desire whether or not the agent can rationally reach this desire from the beliefs and desires that he

ultimately informed by practical rationality itself, i.e., by our non-instrumental reasons about what is rationally obligatory.

⁵ Hooker and Streumer, 'Procedural and Substantive Practical Rationality', 58. This definition of proceduralism and the below definition of substantivism given here are ones I will be using throughout this entire thesis. It is therefore extremely important for my readers to understand them.

or she has”.⁶ And Kant’s view is substantivist precisely because he argues that practical rationality can be thoroughly critical of an agent’s reasons for action, even when that agent is unable to reach such reasons via surveying the current beliefs and desires she has access to.

2.1.2 Kant’s Approach

In general, Kant argues that practical rationality is substantivist in nature, in so far as all rational agents are capable of being motivated by non-instrumental (substantive) reasons: non-desire-based reasons instantiated by practical reason itself. According to Kant, non-desire based reasons for actions exist as a consequence of what is involved in thinking that practically rational agents are capable of self-determined actions. For Kant, if we are to think of agents as practically rational at all, that is, as capable of acting and deliberating on reasons, we must also think of them as being capable of a kind of self-determination. According to Kant, for self-determined action to be possible, the psychology of practically rational agents must not be limited to mere belief/desire pairs (contra Hume and Humeans), but instead, their self-determined actions must be the result of a self-legislative process through which they deliberate and act upon subjective principles, what Kant calls ‘maxims’.

For Kant, when agents take up a maxim, they at the same time take it that that maxim is rationally justified; they take it that the reasons they have adopted for action are good ones. It is this justificatory feature of choosing and acting on maxims that Kant thinks allows reason to be critical of the reasons we take for action. For because our maxim construction is such that a feature of it is that we believe that the reasons we take for action from our maxims are good ones, that is, that they are rationally justified, it follows that maxim-justification must be ultimately informed and constrained by practical reason itself.

⁶ Ibid, 59.

So for Kant, a reason for action is not good simply because an agent thinks it is so. Rather, the only way to ensure that our reasons are good is (to use Kant's terminology for a moment) via law-like principles that are capable of categorically motivating and constraining all agents' maxims and actions in virtue of their rational agency. Yet the only way for such constraint and motivation to exist, according Kant, is for it to be independent of the interests and desires of agents.

There are at least three main reasons Kant's view has been considered the quintessential example of an anti-Humean, anti-instrumentalist view: (a) his substantivist claim about the wide, critical scope of the content of practical reason; (b) his motivational claim that practical rationality can supply agents with reasons for action that are not derivative of desires and interests; and (c) his claim that the motivational and contentful aspects of practical rationality rest on first understanding that the machinery of practical rationality is principle-based, i.e., that agents act on maxims, not belief/desire couples. Since we have provided a sufficient overview of Kant's theory and have begun to understand some of the claims of Kant's conception of practical rationality, let us now turn to exploring these three aspects of Kant's view. Since I think that Kant's substantivist claim (a) and motivational claim (b) rest upon his explanatory claim (c), I will proceed by first providing an account of his principle-based theory of action.

2.2 Reasons For Action: Acting on Maxims

The most fundamental claim of Kant's theory of action is that we do not explain and choose paths of action by citing the desires and beliefs that motivate the action. For Kant, we need more than just beliefs and desires: we need a *reason* for why the action was/is going to be performed. In general, Kant argues that we must have reasons for acting because it

would be very unsatisfactory to merely say that we are capable of causing things to come about without explaining the way in which we are capable of doing so, i.e., without explaining how it is that our actions are self-determined. Kant's view that we must justify our actions is perhaps best explained by what Henry Allison has called Kant's 'incorporation thesis', or what Andrew Reath calls the 'principle of election'. As Reath explains,

Kant held that an incentive never determines the will except through a choice made by the individual, which is to be understood as the spontaneous adoption of a maxim. The root idea is that choice is guided by normative considerations, and that nothing can become an effective motivating reason for an agent except by his or her taking it to be one.⁷

According to Reath's treatment of Kant, agents must think of their actions as self-determined, i.e., chosen by the agent and not merely externally brought about. So, for example, Bob would not fix his car unless he had a reason for doing so. Nor would Mary go to the park unless she took going to the park as something she had reason to do. For Kant then, the first step in understanding how it is that rational agents are capable of bringing about their own actions is seeing that agents are only motivated to act in so far as they have reasons to act.

According to Kant, taking up reasons for action involves formulating maxims, which are more generally a species of what he calls 'practical principles'. Why are reasons best construed as derivative of practical principles, in particular, of maxims? According to Kant, we ought to construe actions as being informed by principles because doing so explains how we take our "action as a mean to an effect".⁸ So, to return to our example, in order to get to work, which Bob desires to do (in Kant's terms he 'wills the end' of going to work), he

⁷ Reath, 'Legislating the Moral Law', 96.

⁸ Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 153.

constructs the maxim, 'If I want to go to work, I will fix the car'. Similarly, Mary formulates the maxim 'if I want my dog to be healthy, I must take him for a walk', where her going to the park is explained by the reason her maxim supplies her with, namely that of walking the dog. Thus according to Kant, practically rational agents formulate principles that tell causal stories about what they must do in order to achieve what they see they have a reason to do.

Another important feature of Kant's conception of action is that we must think of ourselves as acting on principles because our ability to determine our own actions must be consistent with a general theory of causality, i.e., what it is for A to cause B. The causal efficacy of actions must be thought of through a more general theory of causality because for Kant, "the concept of causality brings with it that of laws".⁹ So to think of A as being caused by B is to think that A and B share a law-like structure such that there is a certain necessity entailed between A and B; that there is an underlying reason for why A was able to cause B. Thus we can say that according to Kant's view of self-determination, because "everything in nature works in accordance with laws" it follows that if we are to understand ourselves as capable of self-determination, we must also think of our actions as being governed and motivated by laws, or at least by principles we represent as laws.¹⁰

One last important point about Kant's conception of self-determined agency is this: according to Kant, practical principles (e.g. maxims) do not merely inform agents' actions in an atomic, case-by-case way.¹¹ Rather, Kant thinks agents must guide their actions by means of principles for the very reason that principles prescribe agents to perform similar actions in

⁹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 94.

¹⁰ Ibid, 66, 94. In general, the overall idea is that we must think of our actions as being governed by principles which discipline our practical agency, and do so by means of a kind of rational authority.

¹¹ Onora O'Neil articulates this point well, saying that "agents use practical reasoning to shape or guide their future action. Since practical reason has to bear on action yet to be done, it cannot bear on *act tokens*: there are no relevant, individual act tokens at the time that practical reasoning takes place. So practical reasoning has to bear on *act types*...It might be used to provide reasons for thinking that certain types of action or attitude are required or forbidden, recommended or inadvisable" (O'Neil, 'Kant: Rationality as Practical Reason', 94).

similar situations. That is, since practical principles are the means by which we are able to succeed in being a causal force, it follows that principles inform actions in a law-like manner. This means that a principle is a kind of rule that an agent is able to construct so as to ensure that they are able to bring about (cause) the ends they will (effect). For Kant, it would not make sense to merely say that although principle X would inform agent A in situation B, it would not inform the very same agent in a situation that resembles B. If Paul's favorite flavor of ice cream is vanilla, then in any situation where he finds himself desiring ice cream, he will likely go to a store that sells vanilla ice cream, not chocolate. Thus we can see why it is that Kant believes that every cause must have an effect. For he thinks that if we are to succeed in being self-determined, we must guide our actions in a law-like way.

2.2.2 What Practical Principles Look Like

We can begin to see how it is that Kant's conception of practical rationality, which explains rational agency in terms of acting on reasons and setting ends, allows for him to account for practical *irrationality*. For if agents take themselves to act on reasons for action that are justified, then perhaps sometimes what agents think are justified reasons are really not. Sometimes agents act for unjustified reasons. An example will begin to illustrate the phenomenon of irrationality for Kant. Take Diane, who is in the business of renting elephants to the local circus, and keeps her elephants in a barn outside of her farm house. One night a loud commotion is heard from inside her farm house, and when Diane goes to the barn to see what the matter is, she finds that the elephants have been scared by tiny rodents running about in the barn. Diane clearly sees that she must do something about the mice in the barn in order to allow the elephants to still live there. One way to get rid of the mice, Diane thinks, is to burn the barn to the ground. Thinking that burning the barn would

get rid of the mice, Diane does so. Yet what we must notice is that upon doing burning it, she defeats the very purpose for which she wanted to get rid of the mice: to have a verminless barn for the elephants to live in. Thus Diane's self-defeating actions are irrational. They are irrational, because although they set a certain end (cleaning the barn), the means taken to get to that end result in the end not coming about.

Thus Kant's conception of practical rationality stipulates that our reasons for action must be consistent with one another, and it is this consistency claim that ultimately leads Kant to adopt a substantivist view. However, before we look at the way in which Kant thinks practical reason is capable of supplying us with substantive reasons for action, we must first provide a brief outline of the different types of reasons (i.e., practical principles) Kant thinks we are capable of being motivated by. Specifically, Kant's theory of practical rationality and reasons for action depends upon his distinctions between higher and lower level principles of action because making such a distinction allows for him to account for the possibility that we can act on both instrumental and non-instrumental types of reasons for actions.

The minimal way in which we have reasons for action available to us is through maxims, i.e., subjective principles of action. According to Kant, the role maxims play in explaining and guiding our actions is that of giving us justification for our most immediate actions. However, according to Kant, maxims are to be regarded by the subject as a kind of informing-principle that holds "only for his will".¹² In other words, maxims are kinds of first-order principles which inform agents on an individual basis, i.e., not on a second-order, more widespread basis. Jim does not take it that his reason for going to the store to get vanilla ice cream should be one all agents take up. For Jim to think that a subjective reason

¹² Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 153.

for action should apply to all agents objectively would be irrational.¹³ It would be irrational for Jim to think that his subjective reasons for action constitute reasons for other people to take up because other agents have reasons for action of their own, and, at least sometimes, the subjective maxims they act upon are justified ones. Thus maxims are practical principles, but because they are entirely subjective, they are not to be considered practical *laws*.

For Kant there are other important types of practical principles besides maxims. There are also what Kant calls ‘imperatives’. In general, imperatives divide up into hypothetical imperatives, and categorical imperatives. According to Kant, hypothetical imperatives can be either “rules of skill” or “counsels of prudence”, which means they can either be technical rules “belonging to art” or they can be pragmatic rules that belong to “welfare”.¹⁴ A few examples might help to illustrate these two types of hypothetical imperatives. Take hypothetical imperatives that pertain to prudence, i.e., to an agent’s overall welfare. In general, prudential principles are best seen as a kind of second order principle which informs - imperatively - our more immediate maxims. A good example of a prudential hypothetical imperative that Kant gives is that of providing someone with the counsel “that he must work and save in his youth in order not to want in his old age”, where an agent who accepts and guides his life by such a practical principle does so by governing the lower, first order maxims that are more immediate to his everyday life.¹⁵ Now, while prudential principles are considered to be more than maxims, they are still not to be considered practical laws. Prudential principles are not to be considered more than practical laws

¹³ Besides the fact that it would perhaps be insane for Jim to think this, it would also be irrational, in so far as Jim would have to think that all agents ought to have the same desires he has. Yet there is no good reason for Jim to think that everyone else should desire what he does; surely other agents are permitted to have different desires than he does.

¹⁴ Kant, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 69.

¹⁵ Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 154.

because ultimately, like maxims, they are only prescriptive hypothetically; they do not have the substantive force, say, a categorically imperative principle would.

Characterizing prudential principles as being merely hypothetical ones leads Kant to explain that prudential principles are best thought of as practical ‘precepts’. For although prudential principles provide agents with motivating reasons, what may be called the ‘content’ of the principle still directs us toward “something else which it is presupposed that...[we]...desire”.¹⁶ Sure, the underlying reasons embedded in the prudential principle (like the one in the example above) seem to make good rational sense. And, furthermore, the strength of a prudential principle is such that if someone claimed that they were determined to follow it while nevertheless having conflicting first-order maxims it would follow that they were acting irrationally. Nevertheless, even if all this were true, while prudential principles present themselves as candidates for objective rules of action, they can nevertheless not be considered categorical, practical laws. Prudential principles cannot be considered categorical laws since it is clearly possible (though not likely) for a perfectly rational agent to reject them. In the case of the prudential principle given in the example, it is clearly possible for a fully rational person to deny that he wants to live a long life.¹⁷

The same goes for practical rules of skill. It might be that you have been taught to paint houses from the bottom up, and that when you see me painting my house in a different way, say top down, you think I am doing it wrong. Yet both of us achieve the same end result: both of our houses get painted, and both of us get them painted well. Thus, because there is nothing so clearly irrational in not wanting to save one’s money for retirement (so long as one’s first-order maxims are consistent with the denial of the precept),

¹⁶ Ibid, 154.

¹⁷ It is not clearly irrational on Kant’s view simply because it depends upon a prior desire that an agent may or may not have. In other words, it is not a necessary thing (in so far as practical rationality is concerned) that someone accept and live their life by such a principle.

and there is nothing irrational in painting a house from the top down, it follows that these kinds of hypothetical imperatives (prudential principles and practical rules of skill) and all others like them (namely, ones which presuppose some desire or interest) cannot be held to be practical laws.

2.3 Acting For Non-Desire Based Reasons

I think that the above characterization completes our goal of seeing how it is that Kant thinks that the content of practical rationality is principle-based. Yet the practical principles we have encountered so far have only explained how agents are capable of being motivated by reasons that ultimately depend upon some prerequisite desire(s). The reasons for action we have described are solely motivated by, so-to-speak, instrumental principles that agents make use of in order to provide themselves with reasons for action. Yet although instrumental principles are a crucial aspect of Kant's theory of practical rationality, ones that help explain a great deal of our actions, for Kant there is more to being practically rational than satisfying ones desires. Kant is a substantivist about the critical content of practical rationality, and he thinks that agents are capable of being motivated by substantive reasons for action that do not merely cite their desires and interests. Luckily, in chapter III of Critique of Practical Reason, Kant sets out to explain his substantive theory of practical rationality in detail.

2.3.1 Kant's Negative Account of Practical Reason

Kant begins by providing his negative view of practical rationality, i.e., what it is not. Here Kant denies that (1) the only reasons we have available to us for action are ones ultimately motivated by our propensity to experience pain and pleasure, i.e., hedonistic

reasons for action, what Kant calls being motivated by *self-love*. Secondly, Kant also denies that (2) the only reasons we have available to us are ones that are the result of our attempt to satisfy our own desires and preferences, what Kant calls being motivated by *self-conceit*. In general, the reason why Kant thinks hedonism (self-love) and desire satisfaction theories (self-conceit) of practical reason are problematic is simply that he thinks they are inconsistent, rationally speaking. Let us therefore first take up self-love and self-conceit and understand why neither of these pictures of practical rationality can be the case for Kant.

Hedonistic theories, according to Kant, are the less problematic of these two theories of practical rationality, insofar as practical reason “merely infringes” upon our attempts to act on hedonistic principles, whereas practical reason “strikes down self-conceit altogether”.¹⁸ What then, according to Kant, is it to take hedonistic principles as the overall governing principles of our maxims? For Kant, to do so is to “make oneself as having subjective determining grounds of choice into the objective determining ground of the will in general”.¹⁹ In other words, to take hedonistic principles as the ultimate grounds by which our actions are justified is to take one’s personal reasons for action, those that would promote one’s own happiness, to be objective reasons for choice. To act only for the sake of hedonistic principles is to take one’s personal reasons for action as the *only* reasons one has for action.

For Kant, thinking about our reasons for action as solely consisting of self-loving reasons cannot be ultimately be justified. Of course, as Reath points out, “absent conflicting reasons with deliberative priority, they are sufficient to justify action”, and so if there are no reasons available to an agent that have “higher priority” then it is permissible for an agent to

¹⁸ Or, to put in another way, for Kant practical reason merely “restricts” self-love (ibid, 199).

¹⁹ Ibid, 200.

act for hedonistic reasons.²⁰ But for Kant the problem with only acting for hedonistic reasons is simply that sometimes there *are* reasons available that have higher priority. For Kant these higher-priority reasons demonstrate that those who solely act on the principle of self-love are rationally inconsistent. In taking the principle of self-love as the ultimate principle that governs our maxims, thinks Kant, we thereby inconsistently hold that there are no reasons for action available to us that are directed towards other agents' happiness. But if other agents are just like us, then we ought to accept that such a principle is also the overall guiding principle of their actions, too. Yet in recognizing this, Kant thinks we also have to admit that their happiness is important to us as well, such that we recognize that there are reasons for action that exist independent of our self-loving reasons. Reasons that are independent of our self-loving reasons, according to Kant, just are reasons that are not merely motivated by hedonistic principles, but are reasons for action that are recognizably for the sake of others. Thus the principle of self-love is inconsistent: hedonistic principles cannot be the sole basis of what it is we have reason to do because sometimes, practical rationality rules out the courses of action hedonistic principles prescribe (it rules hedonistic principles out in so far as we are not always justified in acting for hedonistic reasons).

Of course this already begins to show that practical rationality is substantively critical and motivational in nature. Yet for Kant, merely showing that (1) hedonism is false does not suffice, for there are other views about the role practical rationality plays in governing our actions: namely, views that take it that practical rationality seeks to satisfy action that arises out of (2) full blown self-conceit. In general, Kant's argues that self-conceited reasons for action are not just sometimes inconsistent (like in the case of self-love). Rather, according to Kant, self-conceited reasons for action are rationally forbidden; we simply cannot justify self-

²⁰ Reath, 'Kant's Theory of Moral Sensibility', 24.

conceited reasons for action. We might ask though, why not? What is it about self-conceitedness that is so patently irrational?

We cannot justify self-conceitedness reasons for action, thinks Kant, simply because when we attempt to do something for self-conceited reasons we cannot help but see that there are indeed reasons for action available to us that ask us to deny our self-conceit. Let me articulate how this is so. In general, for Kant, self-conceit is an inflated version of self-love, in so far as in the case of self-conceit, “self-love makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional practical principle”.²¹ That is, in the case of agents being motivated by self-conceited principles, the agent takes it that the satisfaction of their own desire trumps that of others, and so regards self-conceited reasons with a kind of law-like authority. Self-conceitedness, then, is a kind of inflated egoism; it is the tendency to regard ourselves as more important than others. Thus while self-love can be compatible with regarding the happiness of others as important, self-conceitedness cannot; to be self-conceited is to take the happiness of others as something that is less important than one’s own happiness.

To explain why it is that Kant thinks self-conceitedness is straightforwardly irrational, recall that for Kant, when a self-determined agent acts, they do so because they take it that their reason for action is justified; they believe that there is a sufficient reason for pursuing the course of action they do. In taking this justificatory claim seriously, what is also implied for Kant is that when agents act they take it that they are worth whatever it is they wish to pursue; they take it that they are worthy of a kind of self-respect.²² Yet in the case of self-conceit, agents take it that other agents are not deserving of the level of respect they themselves are worth. In acting for self-conceited reasons, agents deliberately take it that

²¹ Ibid, 200.

²² Ibid, 201.

their reasons for action are more important than other individuals'; and according to Kant, they do so in a rationally inconsistent way.

An example will help make this clear. Consider John, who sees Jim helpless on the face of a cliff and does not help him out because of his self-conceit. He does not help Jim simply because, in his self-conceit, he does not think he has any reason to do so. For Kant however, the problem with John's self-conceit is that if John were in Jim's situation, he would of course think that Jim ought to help him out. His self-conceited nature would demand that Jim help him. Thus because John ought to recognize that he has a *reason* to help Jim from the cliff side, he must also recognize that his self-conceit is irrational. So self-conceitedness, like self-love, becomes an inconsistent attitude to take towards one's reasons for actions and cannot be the governing principle of practical rationality.

2.3.3 Kant's Positive Account of Practical Reason: Non-Desire Based Reasons for Action

We have now seen what exactly practical rationality cannot be for Kant, and can now finally turn to his positive, substantive claims about the contentful and motivational aspects of practical rationality. These claims are already implicit within his criticism of hedonism and desire satisfaction models. For according to Kant's negative theory of practical rationality, our practical agency cannot merely be explained by hypothetical imperatives, e.g., precepts like the principle of self-love and self-conceit. Our practical agency cannot be explained in this way because to do so would not only be inconsistent - it would also lack the major component Kant thinks makes us practically rational agents, namely that our reasons for action must be fully justified ones. To explain this feature of practical rationality, thinks Kant, we must also incorporate what he calls 'categorical imperatives' into our conception of

practical rationality and reasons for action. Categorical imperatives, according to Kant, are principles which explain how rationality is capable of constraining our agency in an authoritative way. Thus we must incorporate categorical imperatives into our conception of agency because they make sense of the way in which reason can substantively criticize our actions, and at the same time, provide us with obligatory (substantive) reasons for action.

The above discussion of self-love and self-conceit strongly suggests that practical rationality is substantively critical and that substantive reasons for action do exist. Jim and John's situation shows that there are certain reasons for action that apply to agents solely in virtue of their practical rationality; reasons which are not simply a result of agents' prerequisite desires. The reason John has to help Jim from the cliff side is one of these reasons; it does not cite a desire John has to help him out at all (indeed John's self-conceitedness actually motivates him away from helping Jim). Furthermore, substantive reasons for action also explain how practical rationality is capable of being substantively critical, i.e., how John's self-conceitedness is irrational. For because John does recognize a reason for action that applies to him in a normative way - in a categorically imperative way - he cannot justify ignoring Jim by acting on his desire-based-reason to continue walking. John therefore must abide by the substantive reasons and criticism practical rationality gives him and help Jim.

2.4 Conclusions

Thus it follows from John and Jim's case - and all others like it - that in so far as Kant's account of rational agency is concerned, practical rationality is substantivist. Practical rationality is capable of supplying agents with reasons for action that are not merely a consequence of their desires, and it is also capable of criticizing agents' actions when they are not based on justified reasons. Kant's substantive account of practical rationality and reasons

for action is also reasonably straightforward: categorically imperative reasons for action are simply a result of what is involved in thinking that agents are capable of self-determined actions; actions that are governed by maxims, not mere belief desire couples; actions which are explained by a justificatory story about what agents have reason to do.

CHAPTER 3: HUME'S SKEPTICAL PROCEDURALISM

3.1. Why Hume?

In this chapter I will look at Hume's account of practical rationality to begin to focus on the contemporary debate between substantivists and proceduralists. My intent with Hume here, as with Kant, is not to offer any historical scholarship. It is rather to sketch a few themes from the historical roots of some contemporary thinking about practical reason. I begin with a sketch of some of Hume's project, seeking to identify some key claims for my own project. I then examine several influential arguments concerning these claims.

3.1.1 Hume's Legacy

Hume is usefully and most frequently read as a proceduralist about practical rationality.²³ In general, he does not think that reason can offer us any substantial criticism in the way of the specific paths of actions we ought to take.²⁴ Instead, according to Hume, reason can only help figure out how we are to achieve (the means) the things we desire (our ends). Therefore, Hume is an instrumentalist with regards to what we have reason to do. Yet it must also be understood that Hume's proceduralism is not, like some's, broad in scope.²⁵ Rather, Hume's proceduralism is perhaps so minimalistic as to amount to a skepticism.²⁶ For contrary to some contemporary Humean proceduralists, and completely contrary to Kant's

²³ Although not by all. For example, Elijah Milgram, in 'Was Hume a Humean?' denies that Hume is an instrumentalist (proceduralist), contending that he is simply a skeptic about practical reason. Since I am not partaking in any scholarship here (which Milgram evidently is) I will keep with the more common view in literature (as Hooker and Streumer point out) that Hume is a proceduralist.

²⁴ Which is not to say, as we will see, that Hume thinks there are no proceduralist criteria for rational action. It is just to say that he thinks there are very minimal criteria.

²⁵ Brad Hooker and Bart Streumer, 'Procedural and Substantive Practical Rationality', 59-60. I should also note that the term proceduralism, as outlined by Hooker and Streumer, is equivalent to what others have called 'instrumentalism': "because acquiring the new desire is *instrumental* to fulfilling the present desire, proceduralism is also often called instrumentalism" (ibid, 60).

²⁶ For example, Michael Smith's Humean account of practical rationality, which involves both normative and motivating reasons for action.

substantivism, Hume thinks that reason is not capable of motivating us to act at all.²⁷ For Hume, “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will”, in so far as reason is completely inert with regards to motivating us to act.²⁸

According to Hume, our actions are motivated towards or away from things by our capacity to experience pain and pleasure, in so far as the feeling of pain and pleasure naturally attracts or repels us to and from things²⁹. As he says: “Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object”.³⁰ For Hume, since hedonism provides an explanation of our actions it also provides an explanation of motivation via passion. The propensity to experience pain and pleasure, thinks Hume, is simply a non-rational one which is related to the passions and not to reason. Thus, Hume thinks, it is our passions (our desires) and not reasons that take care of the motivational aspect of our agency. Furthermore - and this is key - a desire, unlike a belief or idea, is an “original existence” according to Hume, in so far as it does not contain any “representative” quality that is borrowed from or copied from anything else.³¹ ³² Because desires have an independent ontological status, with the exception of the influence of theoretical rationality, they are almost entirely exempt from rational evaluation. Desires are exempt from rational evaluation because they are prior to any considerations rationality may provide us with. Our

²⁷ At least on a skeptical reading of Hume’s view of practical rationality.

²⁸ Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, 265.

²⁹ In seeing things in this way, it can be safely said that Hume would see a great deal of continuity between explaining the actions of both human and non-human animals.

³⁰ Ibid, 266.

³¹ Ibid, 266.

³² For example, the *feeling* of being angry, unlike the *idea* of being angry, which originates from observing and reasoning about external impressions, originates internally, that is, anger begins from within the agent himself; it is not determined externally (at least not completely) and thus is not directly caused by any reasoning processes. As I will explain below, this is not to say that anger could be a result of acquiring, say a new belief about something that one did not previously have. It is just to say that desires do not have any necessary causal relationship with reason or reasoning, but may or may not *respond* to some reasoning process.

rationality can then only be procedural in nature, thinks Hume: rationality can only instruct us on how to instrumentally satisfy the desires we already have.³³

Hume's proceduralist and desiderative-motivational claims are usefully explained through what contemporary Humeans have called the differing 'directions of fit' of belief and desires. Quoting Mark Platts, Michael Smith outlines the differing directions of fit of beliefs and desires:

Miss Anscombe, in her work on intention, has drawn a broad distinction between two kinds of mental states, factual belief being the prime exemplar of one kind and desire a prime exemplar of the other. The distinction is in terms of the direction of fit of mental states with the world. Beliefs aim at the true, and their being true is their fitting the world; falsity is a decisive failing in a belief, and false beliefs should be discarded; beliefs should be changed to fit with the world, not vice versa. Desires aim at realization, and their realization is the world fitting with them; the fact that the indicative content of a desire is not realized in the world is not yet a failing in the desire, and not yet any reason to discard the desire; the world, crudely, should be changed to fit with our desires, not vice versa.³⁴

What we may take from this passage is that for both Hume and philosophers like Smith and Anscombe who take Hume as a starting place for developing their own views of practical rationality, desires do not aim at truth or falsity. Instead, desires are best thought of as states that aim to bring something about, where the 'aiming' takes place prior to an agent's beliefs about what is or is not the case. As a result of this direction of fit model, Hume and his followers argue that desires are exempt from the kind of criticism that beliefs are susceptible

³³ That is, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Hume's moral psychology consists in belief/desire pairs: that what is required in order to explain an action is a) the desire the agent has and b) the beliefs the agent has about how it is they are to satisfy their desire. This is, for the most part, what Donald Davidson has called a "primary reason" for explaining why agents have performed actions (Davidson, 'Intention and Action', 4), about which Davidson says, "Giving the reason why an agent did something is often a matter of naming the pro attitude (a) and the related belief (b) or both" (ibid, 4).

³⁴ Michael Smith, 'The Humean Theory of Motivation', 51.

to: namely criticism made possible by the essential connection between beliefs and truth.³⁵ The only way desires can be influenced by reason is by means of the judgments they are based upon. Specifically, desires can only be criticized for being based on false beliefs, and can thus only be influenced by reason in so far as reason can instrumentally guide us, through our beliefs, to paths of action which will best satisfy our desires. Thus substantivism about practical rationality and reasons for action, according to the skeptical Humean picture, is a mistaken thesis. For there is nothing in our motivational economy that obligates us, rationally speaking, to pursue one path of action over another, save reference to the desires we have. Other things being equal, there is nothing irrational in preferring to satisfy one desire rather than another.

This brief and simplified sketch of Hume's position helps us isolate three key claims about practical rationality and reasons for action: a motivational claim about reason, i.e., that (a) our beliefs alone are incapable of supplying us with reasons for action; his related proceduralist claim that (b) reason cannot be critical of our actions, and if it is, can only be critical of the instrumental procedures involved in satisfying them; and that (c) our moral psychology is not, as Kant thought, directed and explained by principles, but rather, by belief/desire couples.

3.2 Hume's Account of Motivation: Why Reason Alone Cannot Motivate

Let's consider Hume's claim that rationality cannot, on its own, motivate us to act. Either practical rationality does not exist at all, or at least it does not exist in the overly normative, substantive sense that Kant thought it did. Nevertheless, like Kant, Hume

³⁵ The intuitive force of Hume's point may also be understood in the following way: mental states like beliefs and desires can either be either motivational, or propositional, but not both. A belief cannot be motivational, and a desire cannot be propositional, i.e., true or false.

attempts to explain our agency, i.e., our ability to act for reasons. Yet why for Hume can't rationality be practical in the sense that Kant thought it was, and why must desires, not practical reason itself, be the key component of motivation? Hume's account of practical rationality rests largely upon something Kant's account does not: a dualistic conception of our psychology and agency, divided into reason *and* passions.³⁶ For Hume, positing an ontological distinction between reason and passions makes sense simply because human beings are both rational and emotional creatures.

Hume considers whether it makes more sense to explain the motivational aspect of our agency through our rational capacities or through our desiderative capacities. He begins with our rational capacities, quickly responding negatively to this question.³⁷ For Hume, reason, what he sometimes calls the 'understanding', has the capacity to do two things: reason can be *demonstrative*, in so far as it abstractly regards the "relation of our ideas"; or reason can be *inductive*, in so far as it relates the objects of experience to one another through telling a cause and effect story about them.³⁸ It is obvious, Hume claims, that neither of these theoretical abilities could ever, in and of themselves, cause an agent to act. Mathematical truths do not provide reasons for action. For although demonstrative reasoning is "useful in all mechanical operations", it does not, in and of itself "have any influence [on our actions]".³⁹ Nor does observing that, for example, objects generally obey gravity (inductive reasoning) suffice in itself to provide us with reasons to avoid falling objects. After all, perhaps on a hot summer day sitting underneath a waterfall would be very desirable. Thus because there is nothing within our rational capacities that outright motivates us, save

³⁶ This is not to say that Kant does not also make such a distinction. Kant also accepts a dualistic understanding of the distinction between rationality and the passions. Nevertheless, Kant's conception of agency does not see the importance in the distinction that Hume's does.

³⁷ Which is not to say that reason plays no role in the motivational aspect of our agency for Hume. It is just that reason does not play the central role Hume thinks desires do.

³⁸ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 265.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 265.

referencing a desire we might have to do something, it follows that for Hume “reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to any volition”.⁴⁰ Furthermore, because reason is incapable of motivating our actions, Hume also thinks it is “incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion”.⁴¹ What follows then, is that we must instead look to the passions, e.g., anger, sadness, fear, etc., for an explanation of how it is that our actions are determined.

Hume finds a satisfactory account of motivation in the passions. For Hume we must think of desires, and not reason, as the central motivational component of our agency, because desires are original existences; their direction of fit is mind to world; unlike beliefs, whose direction of fit is world to mind. Thus desires, though they take external things as their objects (and thus eventually involve beliefs), originate in the agent prior to cognition of these objects. Desires are thus basic psychological states within agents that aim for some state of affairs to obtain. Since they are of this nature, Hume thinks desires are the main component involved in providing agents with reasons for action. So, for Hume, to have a reason to eat is simply to be hungry. One need not - indeed one could not, on Hume’s view - justify wanting to eat by anything more than his or her desire to do so. For, so long as there is not a ‘contrary impulse’ to, say, not eat, an agent can continue to eat as much as they want and still have a sufficient reason for doing so.

Take another example to illustrate Hume’s proceduralism. Suppose someone wishes to go running. According to Hume, to have a reason to do something is just to have a desire to (for example) be healthy, to go to the ball game, or to avoid burning gasoline. Whichever of these three paths of action is most instrumental in satisfying one’s desires (indeed in this case it could be all three) is the path of action Hume thinks we have reason to pursue. For an

⁴⁰ Ibid, 266.

⁴¹ Ibid, 266.

agent, Martha, in a situation where she has two completely ‘contrary impulses’, say going to the ball game *or* going to the movies, which both begin at 7 pm, according to Hume’s picture, Martha simply must choose the path of action she desires more.⁴² In choosing the path of action she desires most, according to Hume, Martha thereby makes it explicit what she sees she has most reason to do. This is because for Hume, Martha makes what she has most reason to do explicit by making what she most desires explicit.

3.3 Hume’s Proceduralism

Thus, unlike Kant’s theory of practical rationality, on Hume’s picture a desire is the basis, other things being equal, of a normative reason to do something. It follows that for Hume, an agent’s action (in the service of a desire) needs no further justification. Agents’ actions do not need further justification because, to put it most basically, there is no rational authority that says they need to do so. For Hume there is no need for agents to provide themselves with any further normative endorsement save their personal desiderative endorsement, simply because there is no possibility for any further normative endorsement to exist.

Hume claims that reason is solely instrumental with respect to satisfying our desires, i.e., that practical reason is minimally procedural in nature. Hume’s proceduralism depends upon and expands his claim that the direction of fit of desires is world to mind. Desires are original existences. The content of a desire is not, in general, to be thought of as copied or borrowed from anything external.⁴³ Hume claims that because a desire comes first from the

⁴² As we will see below in section 3, Hume does think that reason can be minimally practical in moments where a desire can be satisfied by multiple different paths of action, in so far as he thinks that a reasoning process is necessary to discern which path of action will satisfy our desires the most.

⁴³ Although it is an open question whether or not it is propositional. Nevertheless, this question is outside of the scope of this paper, and perhaps even Hume’s general theory of desires.

agent and is then directed towards some object, reason is only capable of intervening and criticizing desires in an *after-the-fact* manner. By after-the-fact I simply mean that for Hume, a desire is only ever subject to rational appraisal when it is within the grasp of reason, i.e., about something reason is capable of being concerned with.⁴⁴ It is in this sense that Hume thinks it is correct to say that desires are out of the grasp of reason. As he says, “Tis impossible...that...[a] passion can be oppos’d by or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this [type of] contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider’d copies, with those objects, which they represent”.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, this is not to say that reason plays no role in informing or appraising our actions or ends for Hume. One important claim Hume makes is that reason plays an instrumental role in determining what it is we desire by explaining that our beliefs help us determine the means to our ends.⁴⁶ Hume also claims that in accompanying a belief (what Hume calls a ‘judgment’) reason is capable of a kind of minimal criticism of our desires. For although a desire cannot be true or false, according to Hume desires can be considered what he calls ‘unreasonable’.⁴⁷ Desires can be considered unreasonable, thinks Hume, only when they are accompanied by a “judgment or opinion” which is faulty, i.e., when they are founded upon misrepresentative beliefs. Hume makes two claims about the way in which reason, in this procedural way, can be instrumentally critical with regard to reaching the

⁴⁴ Or as Hume puts it, “nothing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has reference to it” (ibid, 267). Thus because Hume thinks that desires occur in the subject prior to the objects they wish to bring about, it is only when the desire becomes directed at some object through a belief or judgment that it is capable of being criticized.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 267.

⁴⁶ I take this up in the next section when discussing the specifics of Hume’s account of our motivational psychology.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 267.

desires we wish to satisfy: (1) when a passion is “founded on a false supposition”, and (2) when “it chooses means insufficient for the design’d end”.⁴⁸

The first of the two claims Hume makes about practical rationality’s procedural essence is (1) that a desire can be considered unreasonable when it is founded on a false belief. Specifically, Hume says that “when a passion such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition of the existence of objects, which really do not exist” it must be discarded or revised.⁴⁹ So for example, a strong desire to flee from a bear can be criticized by reason if it turns out that the bear does not exist. Or to take another example, a desire to go and see a loved that arises out of the joy that has overcome you upon having learned they are going to get married is dismissed once you learned that this news was a fib. In general for Hume, once one learns that their desire is based on something false, it “yields to reason without any opposition”.⁵⁰ But it is important to note that desires do not yield because the desire is false, but rather, because the belief the desire was based upon is false.

Secondly and relatedly, according to Hume, if a desire arises for an end which is thought to be attainable, but through some process of reasoning is realized to be unattainable, it follows too that that desire must be discarded or revised. If John thinks he can build a house for fifty thousand dollars but then, doing the math, realizes it will cost him an extra fifty thousand he does not have, he must discard, or at least revise his desires. Or, to take another example, if Julia at first thinks she can swim across the English channel in one evening, but, through research, realizes that human beings are not capable of this, she too will no longer desire to do so. If she does continue to desire to do so, according to Hume

⁴⁸ Ibid, 267.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 267.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 267.

there are grounds for thinking that her desire is unreasonable, simply because she wishes for something to come about that cannot. So reason can also be minimally practical in so far as it discerns whether or not we are capable of reaching the ends we set with the means we have available to us.

Thus according to Hume, to the extent that rationality has anything to do with our actions, it is only capable of informing us of the reasons for action we already have as a result of our desires. So, Hume famously claims, making his minimalist proceduralism explicitly clear, that aside from the two ways rationality can be critical of our desires,

Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin...Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.⁵¹

3.4 The Consequences of Hume's Skeptical Proceduralism: Hume's Motivational Psychology

Hume's desiderative-motivational story and his proceduralism take it as a premise that the psychological machinery behind our actions is best explained by citing belief-desire couples. I will now take up Hume's belief-desire explanation of our moral psychology and discuss its relationship with a last, important way in which Hume thinks reason can be practical: by maximizing our desires through means/end reasoning.

Hume's belief-desire explanation of our moral psychology is one of the foundational claims of Hume's philosophy of action, and is also one of the main components

⁵¹ Ibid, 267.

contemporary Humeans have accepted.⁵² According to Hume's explanation of action, we do not need to explain actions in terms of what we have reason to do in the Kantian sense; we neither need nor can provide a story about the rational justification of our actions. Instead, to explain an action, we can simply cite a desire we have for doing something as a sufficient reason for why we ought to do it. For Hume, there is no need to think of actions, like Kant does, as being motivated by maxims and imperatives. We do not act on principles; to explain action in this way is simply mistaken. To explain actions as being motivated by principles is mistaken because for Hume means/end reasoning based upon what we desire to do is simply the only possible way our actions can be guided and explained. So unlike the Kantian model, the Humean model avoids over complication by making use of something agents do clearly seem to take as the basis for their actions: their desires to do things.

The intuitive appeal of Hume's moral psychology also lies in its connection to our theoretical beliefs about the objects of our desires. That is, the other half of the story we need to tell when explaining an actions, besides one about desires, is a doxastic story about the different possibilities our routes to action can take. For Hume, whether or not an agent actually has a reason to do something, that is, whether their desires are properly formed and held, comes by having epistemic capacities that are working soundly. Yet so long as his beliefs are veridical, if John desires a hotdog and knows that there are hotdogs at the ballgame, it follows that he has reason to take action and go. Thus Hume's proceduralism is perhaps best understood as a claim about our moral psychology. For Hume, explaining an agent's actions involves explaining the *relationship* between their beliefs and desires. Hume, in order to explain how it is that desires are influenced by beliefs, argues that actions are informed by a reasoning process (by beliefs) that best allow for the satisfaction of desires.

⁵² In fact so much so that Michael Smith, in 'The Humean Theory of Motivation' points out that explaining actions in this way has become a dogma (Smith, 'The Humean Theory of Motivation, 36).

Take John and his desire for a hotdog and his belief that he can get one in the building.

Although John has a belief that there are hotdogs in the building, and furthermore desires one, John nevertheless still has to determine the best means to getting one. That is, he must now reason about what it is most practical for him to do in order to get a hotdog.

Thus for Hume rationality can be minimally practical, in so far as it can offer a minimal normativity for our actions. Nevertheless, although there is a sense in which John's reasoning about getting a hotdog is normative, it is nevertheless still a procedural kind of normativity, in so far as the practical aspect of his reasoning is just that of discerning which path of action he must take in order to best satisfy his desires.

3.5 Conclusions

According to Hume, practical rationality is minimally procedural. Reasons for action have nothing to do with categorical imperatives; indeed they have nothing to do with imperatives of rationality at all. Rather, all that is required for an agent to have a practically rational reason for action is a belief/desire couple, and furthermore, for them to see which path of action will satisfy their desire.

CHAPTER 4: MODERATE PROCEDURALISM

4.1 Moderate Skepticism about Practical Reason

Having offered a general characterization of Hume's skeptical view of practical reason, I will now consider an influential contemporary account of practical rationality and reasons for action. The view to be considered is skeptical of the critical and motivational scope of practical rationality, but more moderately so. This view, which I will call 'moderate proceduralism' about practical rationality, represents something close to orthodoxy in current debates about practical reason.⁵³ Moderate proceduralists are not so skeptical as to deny the existence of practical rationality and its influence on our reasons for action. For these neo-Humeans, practical rationality is fully capable of supplying agents with normative reasons for action that rationally constrain actions and ends.

These moderate proceduralists follow Hume in two important respects. Like Hume they claim that practical reason is procedural in nature and that our actions are best explained in terms of belief-desire couples. Practical rationality is procedural, contemporary Humeans think, in the very same way Hume thought that it was; it can only offer agents reasons for action that are suitably related (in a sense to be examined) to what they desire. Further, contemporary Humeans think that reason can be critical only of what agents see they have reason to do, in so far as agents' reasons are capable of motivating them through their desiderative capacities. In general, neo-Humeans advocate proceduralist contentful and motivational claims because they wish to hold onto the general premise of Hume's view: his belief-desire psychological theory that beliefs cannot be motivational but only instrumentally

⁵³ For example, among others, Simon Blackburn, Michael Smith, Bernard Williams and David Gauthier.

manage our desires, which alone can be motivational. This is why neo-Humeans call themselves Humeans.

The key thesis of the neo-Humean (hereafter, just moderate proceduralist) account of practical reason is ‘internalism’ about practical rationality and its influence on reasons for action. Internalism about practical rationality and reasons for action is the view that the only reasons a person has are those that are capable of supplying her with *motivation* to act.⁵⁴ Moderate proceduralists about practical rationality want to defend internalism because according to them, it rules out any reasons for action that are not based on the desires agents have for doing something, thus greatly threatening substantivism. Internalism is therefore the core moderate proceduralist claim I examine in this Chapter. I take Michael Smith’s moderate proceduralist account of practical rationality in his ‘The Humean Theory of Motivation’ (and also The Moral Problem) as a sufficiently influential and representative account so as to warrant exclusive attention. But as Smith freely acknowledges, his account is a development of Bernard Williams’ seminal account of internalism in ‘Internal and External Reasons for Action’. Before discussing Smith’s moderate proceduralism I will therefore examine Williams’ arguments for internalism about practical rationality and reasons for action.

4.2 Williams and Smith

For Williams, reasons can either be ‘internal’, in so far as in having a reason for action an agent is capable of being internally motivated by it; or, on the other hand, reasons can be ‘external’, in so far as an agent may recognize a reason for action but nevertheless not

⁵⁴ Or to put it another way, moderate proceduralists hold a kind of subjectivism about how reasons for action can only be personal and private. For them the only reasons for action that exist are ones motivated by subjective states: e.g., our desires, preferences, etc.

be motivated to pursue the path of action that reason stipulates. Generally, Williams' dichotomy is set up to advance a skepticism in the way of external reasons for action. Roughly, there are no such things as external reasons for Williams, since if it were to be possible to act on the basis of 'external reasons', it would follow that these considerations are really internal reasons after all.

4.2.1 Williams' Distinction between Internal and External Reasons

Let us begin with internal reasons. For Williams, internal reasons are those considerations which an agent is capable of being motivated by through "deliberative reasoning", where the person who is presented with the reason "has some motive that will be furthered by his" pursuing that action the reason suggests to him.⁵⁵ In Williams' example Owen Wingrave has come of age and is now a candidate for the army. His father urges him to join. The question at hand for Williams is to see whether or not Owen now has any *reason* to join the army. On an internalist view, in order for Owen to have a reason to join the army he must have some motivation towards joining. So, if Owen acknowledges, say, that his family has a past tradition of joining the army, and this qualifies as a motivation for joining for him, then it follows that Owen sees that there is some internal reason for him to join. Such is an internal reason for action.

On the other side of things, external reasons are those reasons that an agent can recognize while nevertheless judging them to not have any motivational force. According to Williams, external reasons are just those kinds of reasons which are not internal. External

⁵⁵ Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', 101. Or, if Williams' description of internal reasons is unclear in this language, we can turn to David Velleman's definition of internal reasons in his 'The possibility of Practical Reasons' for a clearer understanding of the term. There, Velleman says that in order for something to count as an internal reason it must be such that his reasons for doing something are met via "considerations that would sway him toward doing it if he entertained them rationally" (Velleman, 'The Possibility of Practical Reasons', 693).

reasons are not internal in so far as they are considerations which are not tied to what a person desires; nor could they be, even after sound deliberation. So for Williams, external reasons do not provide the agent with any motive to act. In recognizing that external reasons exist an agent can still ask, 'what motivation do I have to pursue X?'. To return to the above example, suppose that Owens' father is again hounding him to join the army. However, suppose this time Owen does not see his family tradition as constituting a motivational force for joining the army. He is simply is not interested in the army. According to the external reasons theorist, Owen may still recognize that there is a reason for him joining the army. According to Williams, what is important to recognize about Owen and the possibility of him acting on external reasons, is that "even if it were true...that there was a reason for Owen to join the army, that fact by itself would never explain anything that Owen did, not even his joining the army".⁵⁶

According to Williams, internal reasons are the only reasons that actually exist. Williams supplies many arguments against the existence of external reasons. Yet his chief argument against the existence of external reasons draws attention to how failing to act on a reason must be criticizable, and how external reasons cannot make sense of this critical aspect of acting reasons. As Williams points out,

One who makes a great deal out of putting...criticism in the form on an external reason statement seems concerned to say that what is particularly wrong with the agent is that he is *irrational*. It is this theorist who particularly needs to make this charge precise: in particular, because he wants any rational agent, as such, to acknowledge the requirement to do the thing in question.⁵⁷

According to Williams, the external reasons theorist who claims that his reasons, if not accepted, lead to irrationality, must explain how this charge of irrationality could ever be

⁵⁶ Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', 106-7.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 110.

justified. For the only way that an agent ought to have done X rather than Y is for that agent to have seen that there is some motivational aspect of X that is greater than that of Y. Thus the only way to make sense of the possibility of how this reason could be critical of one's action is to explain that what is really taking place is an attempt to provide them with a motivating reason for doing X (rather than Y). In other words, external reasons theorists must, in order to make sense of the possibility of irrationality, see that what they are doing when they offer external reasons to agents is really just offering "optimistic internal reasons".⁵⁸

To fully see how Williams thinks external reasons cannot account for rational criticism, let us return to the example of Owen and his father. When Owen's father says to him that he should join the army, regardless of what he desires (in this case, Owen detests the army and the life-style that goes along with it), he appears to be offering Owen an external reason for joining the army. He is asking Owen to join the army even if he is not motivated to do so. Perhaps the father is trying to get Owen to share his belief that an army career is worthwhile, honorable calling. Owen's father, if he is an external reasons theorist, will thereby charge Owen as behaving irrationally if he does not join the army. He will claim that Owen is irrational in so far as he does not see that his father's external reason provides him with a reason for action. For Williams, what is problematic about this whole picture is that it is clear that Owen's father is just attempting to offer Owen a motivating reason to join the army, and that really, it is just the way Owen's father phrases the reason that makes it sound as if he is offering Owen an external reason. For what Owen's father is doing is, in

⁵⁸ Ibid, 111.

effect, attempting to *motivate* him to sign up. In other words, Owen's father is offering Owen a disguised internal reason.⁵⁹

According to Williams and his followers then, it does not make sense to say that Owen's father even could offer Owen an external reason to join the army. For it is only when we consider how reasons for action are potentially motivating that we can make sense of how an agent's actions could be considered irrational. This is because Owen can only recognize that he ought to do something rather than something else if he has some motivation to do so. So we may therefore conclude that according to Williams, Owen's choices could only be irrational if they were based on internal reasons for action, not external ones.

4.2.2 Williams on Being Practically Rational

For Williams then, the only reasons that exist are those contained within what he calls one's "subjective motivational set" (what Williams refers to as 'S'). A subjective motivational set, according to Williams, is just the set of possible reasons one has available such that, recognizing these reasons would involve some motivational pull to action.⁶⁰ This is the 'internalist requirement' and one can already see how its rejection of externalism seems to threaten substantivism. For the substantivist seems to be an external reasons theorist. She seems to hold that there are certain reasons for action that we have even if we are not motivated to do so, where 'not motivated to do so' for Williams-style internalists means 'not

⁵⁹ Or, to take an alternative explanation of the implausibility of external reasons, we may look to Richard Joyce's explanation in [The Myth of Morality](#), where he says that: "Suppose it were claimed...that I have a reason to refrain from drinking...coffee because it is tapu and must not be touched. This reason will be urged regardless of what I may say about my indifference to tapu, or my citing nihilistic desires to tempt the hand of fate. Regardless of my desires (it is claimed) I ought not drink – I have a reason not to drink. But how could that reason ever explain any action of mine? Could the external reason even explain my refraining from drinking? Clearly, in order to explain it the external reason must have some causally efficacious role among the antecedents of the action (in this case, an omission) – I must have, in some manner, 'internalized it'" (Joyce, [The Myth of Morality](#), 109).

⁶⁰ Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons for Action', 102.

desire to do so'. Yet Williams, if he is right about the internalist requirement, simply rules external kinds of reasons out. The only kind of practical reasoning, consequently, is procedural and instrumental.⁶¹ There are procedural constraints on what counts as sound deliberation, and these constraints are in the service of the satisfaction of an agent's desires.

After making the case for internalism (and thus proceduralism), Williams then goes on to explain what exactly is involved in *having* (being justified in having) an internal reason for action, which unsurprisingly involves an account of what is involved in *not having* (not being justified in having) an internal reason for action. In general, Williams's theory of rationality is very close to Hume's views about how reason can play a minimal, instrumental role in motivating and criticizing our actions. Williams' view certainly helps itself to Hume's psychological dichotomy about desires and beliefs being related, but distinct existences when it comes to explaining our actions. Williams' basic motto for explaining that practical rationality can be critical of the motivating reasons we have available to us is that "an internal reason statement is falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from S".⁶² In general, for Williams, a person's actions can be irrational because it is possible for them to lack justified motivation for the action they think they have reason to pursue. Recalling Hume's two ways in which reasons for action be rationally criticized, Williams claims that a seeming internal reason for action can in fact fail to be motivational if an "elements in S" to be "based on false belief", or, more specifically, Williams' formula is that

A member of S, D, will not give A a reason for doing if either the existence of D is dependent on a false belief, or A's belief in the relevant of doing to the satisfaction of D is false.⁶³

⁶¹ I discuss the consequences of internalism on substantivism further in the following two sections.

⁶² Ibid, 102.

⁶³ Ibid, 102.

Let me illustrate Williams' internalist theory of practical rationality through an example. Suppose that Adam (A) is thirsty for cola. Looking around, Adam suddenly sees what looks to be a can of soda in his field of vision. According to the above picture, he has a desire or reason (D) to ϕ , i.e., drink the can of cola in front of him. Yet as it turns out, Adam has a false belief that there is cola in the can. Perhaps what is inside the can is actually paint. So Adam is thirsty for cola, and thinks that there is cola nearby when there is not. Suppose Adam reaches for the can and takes a drink from it. How are we to explain his action? Well, according to Williams' model, because Adam's D for ϕ is constituted by belief that what is in the can is cola, but it is in fact not cola, this means that he actually does not have a reason to drink the can. So there is no reason in his S for him to drink the can, and doing so will constitute him acting in such a way that does not further his desires. Consequently, according to Williams, Adam's action can be said to be irrational.

With a clearly Humean theme, what this example serves to demonstrate for Williams is that in order to be motivated in a rational way (in order to have a rationally justified internal reason) an agent must have the relevant true beliefs that will allow him to justify his reasons and thus further satisfy his desires. Specifically, what Adam's rational path of action requires, according to Williams' internalist account of practical rationality, is that his "internal reason statements" involve "deliberative reasoning", where deliberative reasoning can involve, say, deliberating on whether "some element in S" is a "causal means to [an] end".⁶⁴ Thus the internalist requirement about reasons for action allows practical rationality to have some sway over what it is we have reason to do, but this influence is, like Hume thought,

⁶⁴ Ibid, 104. It is however important to note that Williams, unlike Hume, does not think that means/end reasoning is the only type of deliberative reasoning. In fact, Williams leaves it largely open as to what kind of deliberative reasoning is possible. This is perhaps what leads him to call his theory a 'sub-Humean' theory, rather than simply a 'Humean' one, and it also, as we will see later when we come to Korsgaard, this mistake she thinks neo-Humeans make with regard to ruling out substantivist theories of practical rationality; that of thinking that deliberative reasoning only consists in means/ends reasoning.

just instrumental (procedural) to satisfying our desires. Adam should have inspected the contents of the can, and he probably should have thought (deliberated) about the fact that he was in a paint store. Yet this point about our deliberative agency is still a proceduralist point. It is proceduralist because although it holds that “we should not...think of S as statistically given”, it nevertheless maintains that S is solely populated by reasons that are solely directed at satisfying our desires.⁶⁵

4.3 Smith's Modified Proceduralism

The main point we can take from Williams' internalism about practical rationality and reasons for action is that while our actions cannot be criticized outside of what we see we have motivation to do, it is nevertheless still clearly possible for deliberative reasoning to show us that there are things that we ought to do (practically speaking). This is because we can come to see that there are things that we are motivated to do that we previously did not see, and that this just shows that practical reason is not motivationally inert.

It is precisely through the claim that deliberative reasoning provides us with reasons for action we previously did not have available to us that Michael Smith sees a justifiable foundation for developing Williams' internalism into a less minimal, and more satisfactory account of practical reason. In this chapter I will argue that Smith's view (at least) appears to capture the main thing substantivists want out of a theory of practical rationality, yet does so without committing to anything more than reasons for action that are instrumental to the satisfaction of our desires. For Smith's proceduralism takes Hume and Williams' claims about the scope of practical rationality further, maintaining that our desires are capable of being thoroughly criticized by practical reason, and, moreover, that our beliefs are capable of

⁶⁵ Ibid, 105.

supplying us with desires not strictly based on prerequisite desires (although our motivations for action are still, according to Williams' internalism, based on our desires).

4.3.1 Motivational Reasons and Normative Reasons

The first step of Smith's thesis lies in making a distinction between two types of reasons: 'motivating reasons' and 'normative reasons'.⁶⁶ According to Smith, both "count as reasons" for motivating an agent's actions.⁶⁷ This is simply the requirement of Williams' internalism: in order to count as a reason for action at all, a reason must be able to motivate agents. For while these motivating and normative reasons share the internalist constraint about motivational content, for Smith they differ in that "motivational and normative reasons make actions intelligible for quite different reasons".⁶⁸ That is, while both motivational and normative reasons adhere to the internalist requirement, the way in which they do - the way in which they *explain* how agents are motivated - is entirely different.

Let me begin with normative reasons. For Smith, one can justify an action being motivated in virtue of being justified by a "normative requirement...from the perspective of a normative system that generates that requirement".⁶⁹ For Smith, normative reasons are best thought of as truths about how we ought to conduct our actions. This is because from the perspective of an agent who, for example, desires to have a drink of water and knows that there is water in the tap, it follows that it is true that she should drink from the tap (she has a normative reason to as a result of the desire she has to drink water). Recalling Williams' theory of practical rationality, one example of a normative system that is capable of generating normative reasons for action is simply practical rationality itself. Perhaps etiquette

⁶⁶ Smith, The Moral Problem, 94.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 94.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 95.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 95.

and manners are another. In general, we might say that Adam could have generated a normative reason through practical deliberation (where the normative system in play is practical rationality) to refrain from drinking the paint just does demonstrate the motivational force of normative reasons. This is because there was a normative reason available to Adam as a result of his perspective that ought to have motivated him – a reason that counted in favor of acting in certain way - if he had deliberated soundly.

On the other hand, motivational reasons for action, according to Smith, are not ‘justificatory’ reasons for action. Rather, they are reasons that psychologically explain a person’s actions. The key difference here is that unlike normative reasons, which purport to be truths that take the form of ‘it is desirable that you not drink that can of paint’ or ‘you ought not drink that can of paint’, by contrast, motivational reasons purport to explain a state that is “psychologically real” in the agent.⁷⁰ According to Smith, although Adam was irrational, we still need to account for how it is that his drinking the can of paint came about, i.e., how he was motivated to do what he did. On his motivational reasons/normative reasons model, Smith thinks we can do this. For drinking the can of paint came about by Adam having a desire for his thirst to be quenched and his (false) belief that the content of the can was soda. While this action may be said to be irrational (in so far as normative reasons are concerned, Adam’s action was not justified) what is important for Smith is that it be understood that Adam’s motivation for drinking the can of paint is psychologically real. Thus Adam had a motivating reason - a psychologically real one - but because he also had a normative reason not to drink the contents of the can, his motivating reason was an irrational one. Thus motivational reasons do not justify, but purport to explain an agent’s

⁷⁰ Ibid, 95.

behavior. They explain how it is that an action came about, namely through a desire to do something and a belief about how to do it (a belief-desire couple).⁷¹

4.3.2 Smith's Moderate Proceduralism

The second step of Smith's proceduralism is to show how it is possible for our beliefs about the normative reasons we have available to us to influence our desires, and thus our motivational reasons. Smith's project here is that of attempting to broaden how far the internalist requirement reaches. Thinking that the only reasons we have for action are internal ones (and thus not external reasons), Smith's task is to show that practical rationality can still be thoroughly critical of our actions while nevertheless remaining procedural.

In order for reasons to have such a normative force, they must be such as to be able to *criticize* motivational reasons, in so far as normative reasons would constitute a rational constraint on motivational reasons. In fact, this is exactly what Smith argues. To do so, Smith grounds himself in Williams' model of practical rationality. Recall that for Williams, practical rationality is essentially able to generate normative, internal reasons about what to do in so far as it constitutively aims at the satisfaction of our desires. Going beyond Williams' view, Smith argues that it is possible for certain kinds of beliefs to have motivational force, in so far as these beliefs are capable of supplying us with desires we previously do not have. What are these special kinds of beliefs? For Smith, they are those beliefs that are inspired by deliberating about what our "fully rational self" would desire, and by deliberating in this way, Smith argues that we are thereby provided with normative reasons for action to guide and criticize our motivational ones.⁷² What does Smith think a 'fully rational self' is? What would he/she want? And, finally, how it is that deliberating

⁷¹ Ibid, 96.

⁷² Ibid, 155.

about what our fully rational self would want can supply us with normative reasons for action, capable of criticizing our motivational ones?

According to Smith, a fully rational self has (1) no false beliefs, (2) only the relevant true beliefs and (3) must deliberate correctly.⁷³ In other words, a fully rational self is just an idealized counterpart of our non-fully rational self, one which has no irrational beliefs and desires. For according to Smith, since one's fully rational self has only the relevant true beliefs (and no false ones) concerning what it ought to do, and furthermore, always deliberates correctly about how it ought to do it, it would not ever have the kind of desires that, for example, Williams thinks are based on unjustified motivational reasons. It would not, because all of the things that get in the way (false beliefs and unsound deliberation) of being justified in having a motivating reason for action would no longer exist. A fully rational self then, would only have fully rational desires; desires that are never mistaken about the objects they are directed towards, desires that understand the means/ends relationship between what it is they are directed at and what is involved in getting it.

So according to Smith, we enjoy normative constraints on our actions by means of our beliefs about what our rational self would desire. Through deliberating about these beliefs, we realize that some of our motivating reasons for action are unjustified, since our new gained normative reasons tell us that these actions are not 'fully' rational ones; that there are other reasons for action in the neighborhood that would satisfy our desires better. Let us return to Adam and the can of paint, and, using Smith's model, explain his actions. This is not difficult to do. For according to Smith, in order for Adam to have recognized that drinking the can of paint was irrational, on Smith's model, Adam ought to have deliberated about what his fully rational self - his counterpart - would believe and desire. Suppose that

⁷³ Ibid, 155.

he did. In realizing that his fully rational self would not believe that what is in the can is cola, and furthermore, that he would not desire to drink paint, Adam would then form the desire not to drink the can. He would not, because simply put, his fully rational self would not be *motivated* to do so, thus providing him with a normative reason not to as well. Thus according to Smith, through reflecting on what one's fully rational self would do we thereby are able to criticize our current desires, revising them and motivating new ones in order to fit what our idealized counterpart would desire.

4.4 Conclusions

To conclude, I want to stress that Smith's view is a prime example of one that incorporates a thesis about thorough normative constraints on action while nevertheless remaining Humean and proceduralist.⁷⁴ For while Smith's view maintains that we are capable of enjoying normative constraints on our actions, it also maintains that our actions are best described by a belief-desire psychological model, and also, that our beliefs and desires are ontologically distinct mental states (the direction of fit of each only pointing one way).⁷⁵ And perhaps more importantly, Smith's holds tight to the proceduralist thought that what we have reason to do is solely a result of the desires we wish to satisfy. For Smith's adherence to

⁷⁴ Or, consider another example which demonstrates the obvious way in which Smith's model is committed to thick normative constraints on our actions, unlike, for example Hume, who holds that we can prefer "acknowledg'd lesser good to...greater" (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 267). On Smith's model, I do not see how it would be possible for us to hold this, as Hume suggests we can. We cannot firstly, because to acknowledge that some path of action X will satisfy my desire D less than path of action Y is just to say that Y will satisfy D and thus contribute to my overall greater good (even if it at first I think it will contribute to my lesser good). There is also another reason though, one which pertains to Smith's account specifically. Suppose, for example, that in becoming a lawyer (which is my life long goal), I have the opportunity to do a visiting year at Harvard. Would it be possible for me to not accept, taking the acknowledged lesser good? Smith's account says no. It does so just because my fully rational self would see that taking such a path would be based on a false belief that doing so would best satisfy the desire I have to become a Lawyer. If I know ("Acknowledge") Harvard will be the best thing for me, I cannot simply decline without being irrational.

⁷⁵ Again, although Smith holds that certain beliefs can be motivational, his argument is actually just that certain beliefs can inspire desires as a result of normative reasons generated from these beliefs. So beliefs and desires still remain distinct mental states on Smith's model.

the internalist requirement allows that, whatever normative constraint is imposed upon our motivating reasons by our thinking about what our fully rational self desire, these normative constraints are still only instrumental ones.

CHAPTER 5: THE WIDE GATES OF INTERNALISM

5.1 The Internalist Requirement and its Effects on Substantivism

How does our discussion of Smith weigh in on the substantivist/proceduralist debate? Well, what we may notice after having considered Smith's proceduralism is that it presents an even greater challenge to the substantivist than Williams' internalism and Hume's minimal proceduralism. For Smith's view appears to have the key virtue substantivists want to argue for - normative constraints on our actions - while nevertheless remaining proceduralist. Accordingly, the substantivist will have to refute Smith's skepticism by either accepting the internalism requirement, or by showing how externalism can be redeemed. The substantivist will also have to explain why a theory of practical rationality would want to claim anything more than what is already demonstrated by Smith's moderate proceduralism.

In her 'Skepticism about Practical Reason' Christine Korsgaard takes up both of these tasks. She argues that the kind of *motivational skepticism* about practical reason that Smith's view advocates - skepticism about whether or not we can be motivated by norms and principles of rationality that do not reference what we happen to want - has no force in so far as the substantivist/proceduralist debate is concerned.⁷⁶ Motivational skepticism about substantive constraints on our actions, she argues, is always based on a more specific skepticism about what exactly the content of practical rationality is (*content skepticism*): skepticism about what the content of practical rationality actually consists of, and skepticism about whether or not norms of rationality have any substantive content in the way of guiding and criticizing our actions, ends and desires.

⁷⁶ Of course this is not Korsgaard's terminology. Nevertheless, her project can be thought of as pro-Kantian and anti-Humean, thus setting her paper up as one which addresses the substantivist/proceduralist debate.

In her paper, Korsgaard does not address whether content skepticism should be taken seriously. Rather, her main point is that many philosophers who have thought that motivational skepticism is a standalone claim have made a mistake in thinking that internalism about reasons for action rules out substantivist theories of practical rationality. That is, Korsgaard's goal is to show that motivational skepticism has rested on an undefended form of content skepticism. Furthermore, as she points out, this undefended content skepticism proceduralists wield has also led them into mistakenly thinking that substantivist theories, like the one Kant advocates for example, holds a kind of externalism about reasons. Yet Korsgaard points out that while internalism about reasons for action is correct, and that substantive theories will therefore have to adhere to it, the internalist requirement's gate is so wide that it allows almost every theory of practical rationality to enter into it. It follows that if Korsgaard is right, substantivism is not defeated by Smith's view, at least in so far as Smith's proceduralism does not yet rule substantivism out. Rather, substantivism is entirely compatible with any form of internalism requirement we might seek.

In this chapter I look at the argument Korsgaard provides concerning the internalism requirement. Following Korsgaard, I do not specifically address whether content skepticism has any force. Nor do I offer arguments in the way of defeating Smith's positive proceduralist thesis. Rather, I simply point out that views like the one Smith advocates are mistaken about what the internalism amounts to. I then show how substantivism is compatible with internalism. After demonstrating that a substantivist-internalist theory of practical rationality is possible, I follow with a discussion of Smith's thoughts on our moral psychology, and how, through Korsgaard's view, it is still left open as to what the best psychological explanations of our actions are.

5.2 True Irrationality

Like Smith, Korsgaard's argument begins with Williams' view. According to Korsgaard, Williams' internalism is obviously correct: reasons for action must be capable of motivating us. The internalism requirement, Korsgaard thinks, is a design constraint on our theories of normative reasons for action. Nevertheless, Korsgaard claims, the internalism requirement has been largely misunderstood. Internalism does not require, to be sure, that reasons for action must *necessarily* motivate us. If reasons and rational considerations about action were necessarily motivating, there would be no possibility of what Korsgaard calls 'true irrationality', which is "failure to be motivated by the consideration that...[an]...action is the means to your end".⁷⁷ Surely, Korsgaard maintains, any theory of practical rationality, even a skeptical theory, "admits that human beings can be motivated by the consideration that a given action is a means to a desired end".⁷⁸ Thus even skeptics like Hume, who maintain a very minimal proceduralism must, if they wish to advocate a theory of practical rationality at all, admit that sometimes we can fail to be motivated by a reason we evidently see will satisfy some desire we have.⁷⁹ And so Korsgaard does not think the internalist requirement advocates any necessity concerning how reasons for action motivate us to act. Rather, she thinks, "rational considerations must succeed in motivating us insofar as we are rational", i.e., in so far as we take our reasons for action to be justified ones.⁸⁰

Focusing on the structure of Williams' internalist model, Korsgaard then considers how admitting the existence of true irrationality might begin to show that the motivational skepticism that proceduralists like Smith (and certainly Hume) advance depends upon an

⁷⁷ Korsgaard, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', 319.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 319.

⁷⁹ As Korsgaard points out though, one can admit the possibility of true irrationality and yet still believe that all practical reasoning is instrumental. I discuss whether this is the case in the next chapter.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 321.

undefended content skepticism about practical rationality. As she explains, it could turn out that true irrationality is consistent with a proceduralist view of practical rationality. This is not her concern. Rather, Korsgaard wants to show how our motivational explanations of cases which involve true irrationality depend - in ways often unnoticed or unacknowledged - on what we take the content of practical rationality to be. For if we admit the existence of true irrationality, she thinks, then sometimes it must be possible to recognize an end we ought to pursue and nevertheless choose to bring about some lesser important end. Cases in which we realize we ought to pursue some end but do not are called *akratic cases*, i.e., weakness of will.⁸¹ Take the following example of *akrasia*. Say I know I should go to the office and do my work (because I have a desire to keep a steady income) but instead stay at home and watch television. Further, say that watching television does not, in the end, satisfy my desires more than going to the office. For if I desire to even have a television to watch *at all*, I should go to work so as to be able to afford to do so. Thus it seems that it must be my weakness of will - my *akrasia* - that keeps me on the couch.

Korsgaard has two points about akratic situations. First, as she points out, admitting the existence of *akrasia* and true irrationality demonstrates that reason does have some say with regards to motivating our actions. For reason can tell us to do something which we do not desire to do: although my desires would be more satisfied by going to the office, *presently* I do not desire to go but to stay and watch television. Secondly, and more crucially, Korsgaard points out that how we explain akratic cases depends upon the more general explanation we give about the content of practical rationality, i.e., the precise norms that constitute practical rationality. If we think it is limited to a means/end kind of deliberation, we might deny (perhaps problematically) that true irrationality is possible and attempt to

⁸¹ To be clear, weakness of will occurs in situations where an agent acknowledges something they ought to do and nevertheless does not do it. Rather, they do something else.

explain my watching television as being constituted by having more of a desire to do so (and thus, on this view, that it is for my greater good to watch television, versus going to the office). However, perhaps we want an account of practical rationality that attempts to make sense of our actions in a more satisfying way. That is, it is likely that we will want to hold that practical rationality is capable of supplying agents with, say, prudential considerations. Yet if we want to hold that agents are capable of being motivated by prudential considerations, we will probably explain my choosing television over work as being truly irrational. We will explain my actions as truly irrational because prudential reasons for action are usually good, justified ones, at least in so far as the reasons why we act prudentially are because we take prudential reasons to be normatively justified reasons. So even a procedural account of rationality must explain that sometimes, what we will desire in the future is just as important - and sometimes even more important - than those things we currently desire.

5.2.1 Korsgaard and Williams

After making this point about genuine irrationality, Korsgaard then moves on to showing how internalist accounts of reasons for action can allow for deliberative reasoning processes which are not strictly means/end based. For as Korsgaard points out, Williams' model leaves it open as to what exactly the contents of one's 'subjective motivational set' are. For what is important for Williams, recall, is showing that all reasons that constitute action are internal, in the sense that they are "reached by a process of deliberation from the subjective motivational set".⁸² By contrast, recall that external reasons, which he thought are nonsensical, are those reasons that exist *regardless* of one's subjective motivational set.

⁸² *ibid*, 326.

According to Korsgaard, Williams is also right about external reasons: external reasons are not motivational and therefore do not make sense. Nevertheless, although external reasons do not make sense, Korsgaard points out that this does not mean that substantive reasons for action do not exist. Rather, that external reason claims do not make sense simply means that substantive reasons for action must adhere to the internalist requirement; substantive reasons must be reachable via one's subjective motivational set.

It may be thought that William's internalist model cannot accommodate substantive considerations. For substantive reasons for action, according to Korsgaard, are actions that are derived from principles and norms of reason. Yet Williams' model, at least upon first glance, does not seem to be able to accommodate the possibility of actions based upon principles and norms. Smith's extended version of Williams model did not even consider the possibility of actions motivated by principles and norms. Yet the problem with proceduralist thinkers like Smith, Korsgaard thinks, is that they hold too tight to what they think the internalist requirement implies. Korsgaard points out that in holding too tight to the motivational aspects of our agency, however, many philosophers have left it largely *unquestioned* as to whether substantive reasons for action could exist by means of an internalist, principle-based model of action. As Korsgaard points out, this may be because internalists like Smith who have been influenced by Williams' model mistakenly assume that practical rationality is limited to instrumental, means/end reasoning. Thus Korsgaard's thought that philosophers who think about practical rationality through a skewed understanding of internalism may be taken as a more general claim that these philosophers

have also based their motivational claims about practical rationality on an undefended idea of the possible content of practical rationality.⁸³

As Korsgaard finds, Williams model does indeed allow that deliberating about the contents of one's subjective motivational set does not merely include means/end deliberation, but in fact many other ways of reasoning: "the process of deliberation can have all sorts of effects on [the subjective motivational set] and this is a fact which a theory of internal reasons should be very happy to accommodate...it should be more liberal than some theorists have been about the possible elements in the [subjective motivational set]".⁸⁴ With this possibility opened, Korsgaard then points out that it is possible to derive "acting for reasons of principle" through deliberating on the contents of our subjective motivational set.⁸⁵ Let me explain how it is possible to act on principle-based reasons, rather than, say, mere means/end reasons.

Take John, who is not particularly good at baseball. He nearly always misses the ball and the only time that he does not miss the ball, as it turns out, is when he closes his eyes and swings when he hears the ball coming. Recognizing this, because John does desire to hit the ball more often, he decides to make it a principle for his batting that he will always close his eyes and swing upon hearing the ball being thrown. That is, John makes it a principle that whenever X occurs he will do Y.⁸⁶ What is important about John's principle, rationally speaking, is not that he actually hits the ball every time. Instead, what is important is that

⁸³ This is not to say that there means/ends model are as primitive as, say, Hume's. Nevertheless, it can be safely advanced that what is involved in explaining our actions for Smith involves nothing more than deliberating on our desires and the beliefs that will allow those desires to be satisfied.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 327

⁸⁵ Ibid, 327.

⁸⁶ Here it might be helpful to recall Kant's explanation of why principles are capable of guiding our actions. For Kant, recall, we should think of our actions as being guided by principles because this is a way of accounting for how agents take themselves to be causally efficient. Kant's thought was that if we are to think of our actions as being self-determined we must think of them as being capable of being governed, like nature, by laws. For more discussion on the issue of self-determination, see chapter 6.

even if he does not hit the ball every time (because sometimes he mistakes the sound of the pitcher throwing it with the sound of someone at first base pretending to throw the ball) he nevertheless acts upon a principle that he decided he will act upon even if his desires are not satisfied every time he swings. I do not think that it is hard to imagine John, or anyone else, deciding to act on such a principle. Moreover, it is not hard to see how this is something that could be generated from one's subjective motivational set. Thus reasons for action are not limited to the means/end reasoning processes many proceduralists advocate. Reasons for action can also be based on broader types of reasoning, like principle-based reasoning.

5.2.2 Principle-Based Action and the Possibility of Substantive Reasons for Action

Korsgaard thinks that with this example of how means/end reasoning is not the only kind of reasoning we can begin to see what substantive reasons for action would look like. Rather than assess arguments for whether substantive reasons for action exist, however, in this section I want to consider Korsgaard's thoughts about the possibility of how they could exist. I want to simply because it is vitally important to understanding her arguments about the way in which many proceduralists have been mistaken about the internalism requirement. More generally, understanding how substantive reasons for action could exist is also vitally important for understanding her claim that there is a direct relationship between motivational skepticism and content skepticism.⁸⁷

So then, what would a model of practical rationality that argued that substantive reasons for action exist involve? As we have already seen with Kant, a substantive model of practical rationality would surely have to include a story about agents acting on principles and norms which stipulate that there reasons are ultimately justified ones. Yet here

⁸⁷ I address this issue in chapter 6.

Korsgaard raises the point that it might be argued that Williams' internalist requirement only allows that agent's act on principles of subjective interest; reasons for action which reference their desires. For, even if acting on principles or norms can have motivational force for our actions, it might not follow that principles can supply us with the thorough justificatory requirements substantive reasons for action require. Korsgaard admits that this might be a good point if it were not so unclear and ambiguous. This point, she says, is certainly not a conclusive or followed through argument, since in general, it has "a very unclear bearing on [what] the claims of pure practical reason" are.⁸⁸ Again, while it stands that the internalism requirement is correct, all that follows in so far as the possibility of substantive reasons for action existing is that they are internal reasons for action that are capable of motivating us.

Korsgaard's account of how an internalist-substantive theory of practical rationality might be possible can be taken as a point against proceduralists (e.g., Smith) who have, in thinking that a substantive theory of practical rationality must be externalist, attempted to derive normative constraints by referencing agents' desires. Of course, a proceduralist conception of practical rationality has not yet been ruled out here, and admittedly, a conception of motivation which does not strictly depend on the satisfaction of our desires may at first seem odd.⁸⁹ However, perhaps the thought that a substantive theory of practical rationality could be internalist seems odd because it is a dogma that substantive theories must be externalist, a point which proceduralist-internalists like Smith and Hume have mistakenly advocated. Moreover though, as Korsgaard explains, there is a very intuitive way in which thinking about substantive motivation is not odd at all. For according to Korsgaard, the possibility of practical rationality having substantive content stands or falls with whether there is "something in us" that is capable of being motivated in a non-desire-based way.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 327.

⁸⁹ Again, this is the topic of the chapter that follows this one.

Perhaps, as Korsgaard points out, this is simply the way in which Kant thought our reasons for action must be justified by practical reason itself. All that would follow from thinking that our maxims must be ultimately justified, thinks Korsgaard, is that every human being is capable of being motivated by normative reasons for action, something we have already seen in our discussion of Williams. Thus enjoying substantive reasons for action that apply to everyone would seem to require that all agents - in virtue of practical rationality and reasoning itself - recognize and take into account substantively critical considerations when they deliberate about reasons for action. So, for example, if some principle or norm X existed that admitted of some ultimate justification for pursuing the reasons X dictates, it would follow that since every agent, in virtue of being able to deliberate about the contents of their subjective motivational set, would be able to reach the same conclusions about X, at least in so far as they were rational. According to Korsgaard, thinking about this justificatory process is how reasons for action that are not based on what agents happen to want could possibly exist, at least in so far as motivational considerations are concerned.

5.3 Our Moral Psychology:

The 'Desire-in Desire-out' Principle and the 'Belief-in, Action-out' Principle

I now want to return to our discussion of Smith's proceduralism and conclude by showing how Korsgaard's argument about motivational skepticism relying on content skepticism allows substantivist theories of practical rationality to stand side by side with Smith's explanation of agents acting for reasons.

In his article, 'How to Argue about Practical Reason', R. Jay. Wallace characterizes Smith's proceduralism as essentially teleological. This is just to say that Smith's view

characterizes agent's actions as being ultimately directed by goals.⁹⁰ In general, this describes Smith's view well: Smith's normative reasons for action make themselves available to agents through deliberating about the teleological structure of their desires, and specifically, through their beliefs about what their 'fully rational self' would desire. Furthermore, as Wallace explains, Smith's goal-directed internalism commits itself to what he calls the 'desire-in, desire-out' principle. The 'desire-in, desire-out' principle says that "a motivated desire... is one that is explicable in terms of reasons", and yet if "reason explanations are essentially teleological" and attribute a "goal to the person who has the reason" it follows that "to have a goal is already to be in a state of desire".⁹¹ This 'desire-in, desire-out' principle Smith's view advocates is also exemplified well in the following passage from Smith,

A motivated desire is a desire had for a reason; that is, a desire the having of which furthers some goal that the agent has. The agent's having this goal *is*, in turn, *inter alia*, the state that constitutes the motivating reason that he has for having the desire. But if the state that motivates the desire is itself a reason, and the having of this reason is itself constituted by his having a goal, then, given that the having of a goal is a state with which the world must fit rather than *vice versa* . . . , so it follows . . . that the state that motivates the desire must itself be a desire. Thus, the Humean will say, the idea that there may be a state that motivates a desire, but which is not itself a desire, is simply implausible.⁹²

And so Smith argues that the result of viewing our actions as being essentially teleological, plus internalism about reasons for action, is that all of our actions must be motivated ultimately by our non-rational attributes, i.e., by our desires. So Hume was right after all.

Or was he? Aside from Smith's controversial claim that to have a reason is to be in a goal directed state, Korsgaard's argument certainly seems to show that Smith's argument

⁹⁰ I discuss the difference between teleological view like Smith's and non-teleological views like my own in chapter 7.

⁹¹ Wallace, 'How to argue about Practical Reason', 374.

⁹² *Ibid*, 373.

moves too fast. We cannot make claims about how we are or are not motivated by rational considerations without first understanding what the *contents* of rational deliberation might possibly be.⁹³ William's model allows for types of reasoning that are not just means/end, namely principle-based reasons for actions. Principle-based reasons for action are generated by a sort of rational deliberation, and as Korsgaard points out, they might be thought of as coming about through the kind of process Kant imagined happens every time we act, namely via deliberation about whether our reasons are rationally justified. Furthermore, thinking of our actions as being constrained by a kind of justificatory process, as Kant thought, also tells a story about motivation which does not solely reference our desires and preferences. Rather, it explains that we can be motivated by reflection on what we have justified reason to do; it maintains that, for example, we can sometimes be motivated to act by our beliefs alone.⁹⁴ And so understanding whether the substantivist or the proceduralist is right about the content of practical rationality seems to ultimately depend upon the moral psychological view they advocate, and of course, which view (if either) is correct.

This does not, to be sure, show that the upshot of Smith's positive claim about practical rationality and normative constraints is false. For it still stands to be shown whether all of our reasons for action are formed, as Smith maintains, by a kind of 'desire-in, desire-out' deliberation: deliberation that begins with our motivating desires, and then, through beliefs about what our fully rational selves would want, is capable of providing us with new, rationally proficient desires. Yet while Smith's view has not been completely ruled out, there is also something that has been ruled in as a possibility. For Smith's internalist 'desire-in,

⁹³ Smith's claim that reasons are always goal directed, it seems to me, is patently false. For example, as Wallace points out, to have a reason to believe X, for example, does not reference any specific goal, and it certainly does not reference our desires in the way Smith's argument appears to force it to. In chapter 7 I show more conclusively why a teleological model of justification cannot in the end hold up and that we need a non-teleological model of justification to account for the wider diversity of reasons for actions we act upon.

⁹⁴ Namely, by our beliefs about how our reasons for actions are justified and whether or not they cohere and are consistent.

desire-out' principle is mistaken in that it does not allow for another kind of motivation, namely, what we may call actions motivated by a kind of 'belief-in, action-out' principle: a principle that explains that we are capable of being motivated by rational inferences alone. In other words, what has been ruled in as a possibility is a principle that explains that we are capable of being motivated by substantive reasons for action.

CHAPTER 6: DEMONSTRATING SUBSTANTIVISM

6.1 A Recap: Where the Argument Stands

We began Chapter One by tracing some of the roots of contemporary thinking about practical rationality and reasons for action. We saw that two historical thinkers, Kant and Hume, have decisively shaped much of the current debates on the subject. Kant made, recall, three specific claims: (a) a substantivist claim about the scope of practical reason; (b) a motivational claim about practical rationality being capable of supplying agents with reasons for action that are not derivative of desires and interests; and (c) a claim that the motivational and contentful aspects of practical reasoning are not merely belief-desire couples, but more generally maxims and principles. In general, Kant's argument for these three claims about practical reasoning rested on a picture of agency that took seriously the phenomena of self determination: specifically, a picture which suggests that agents are choosers and deliberators and not merely a locus of causal psychological forces. Kant also thought that consequences of a view which emphasizes self-determination were that our reasons for action must be rationally justified, and that this justificatory process ultimately required that practical rationality be substantively critical of our reasons, choices and actions.

After considering Kant's substantivism, we turned to Hume's extreme skepticism about practical reason. Here we saw an argument that reached a conclusion contradictory to Kant's. Hume is a minimal proceduralist about practical rationality: he argues that reason cannot be critical of our reasons for action like the way Kant thinks it can, and furthermore, that it cannot supply us with any reasons for action save those directed towards the things we want. Hume's three claims, which for expository purposes I set against Kant's, are that (a) our beliefs alone are incapable of supplying us with reasons for action and must always be accompanied by a desire; (b) reason cannot be critical of our actions, apart from assessing

the standards of the instrumental procedural norms that counsel the satisfaction of our desires (proceduralism); and (c) maxims do not figure into the best explanations of our self-determined actions, but rather instead are best explained by belief-desire couples. Hume's empiricist theory of practical rationality (or skeptical theory) rested on his thought that reason is only ever theoretical in its deployment. Consequently, Hume thought, reason cannot supply agents with motives for action. Instead, Hume thought, it is our desiderative capacities - what he called the passions - which motivate us and give us reasons for action. Furthermore, because Hume thought that our desiderative and epistemic capacities have separate existences, it followed for Hume that our desires are almost totally incapable of being criticized by reason (save when our desires accompany a false belief).

After tracing themes from Hume and Kant that are important for contemporary theorizing, we then moved to several inter-related debates in theories of practical rationality and reasons for action. Contemporary Humeans developed Hume's thought - in a non-skeptical vein - claiming that reason is only ever procedural, and further, that actions are still explained by belief/desire couples. While sympathetic to Hume's skepticism about the critical force of practical rationality, Humeans like Michael Smith argued that our desires are not entirely outside of the scope of reason. Here we saw that Smith's moderate proceduralism took foundations from Bernard Williams' internalism about reasons for action, holding that reasons for action must be capable of motivating agents; they must trigger some desire an agent presently has (or could arrive at from her existing desires through deliberation). Through the internalism requirement, Smith then developed a general account of practical rationality, showing how we can enjoy normative constraints on our actions through it. In general, Smith claimed that sometimes the reasons for action we take can be rationally criticized. According to Smith reasons for action can be criticized when

they are not based on sound deliberative reasoning, which, if undertaken, would provide one with a normative, motivational reason to do some action X and not Y (for example, in cases of *akrasia*). Moderate proceduralists like Smith, as we saw, conclude that this is all that can be had from a theory of practical rationality. According to moderate proceduralists; (a) substantive reasons for action (of the sort Kant imagined) for action do not seem to be capable of motivating us to act (they are external reasons) and so do not make sense; and (b) we do not need them anyway, since we already have normative constraints on our actions through the proceduralist account.

Our discussion then turned to Korsgaard's criticism of contemporary Humean theories of practical rationality. To be sure, here we did not show that "unconditional principles of reason" capable of supplying us with substantive reasons for action exist.⁹⁵ What we showed through Korsgaard was that, contra Smith, there is no reason to think they do not. Motivational skepticism reduces to a question about the content of practical reasoning, about whether or not norms of reason that are capable of guiding and motivating actions actually exist. What we demonstrated with Korsgaard, therefore, was that there is nothing limiting about internalism being true. For internalism does not in general place limits on one's conception of practical rationality and reasons for action. Since we are capable of being motivated by principles, it merely remained for us to consider whether *purely rational* considerations (ones that are of the 'belief-in, action-out' kind) are capable of providing us with substantivist kinds of reasons for action. This we thought, was a direct point against Smith's view and procedural views like it that attempt to derive normative constraints on our action solely from a means/end model of practical rationality.

⁹⁵ Korsgaard, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', 329.

We now have an even playing field; a kind of ‘standoff’ about internalism.

Internalism is probably just a deep psychological truth about our agency, for as it turns out it really just amounts to a motivational requirement on reasons for action. It then follows that it cannot be used to argue for proceduralist (empiricist) or substantivist (rationalist) views about practical rationality. What really is at stake then, is whether the best theory of the content of practical rationality is something akin to what Kant defended or what Hume defended.⁹⁶ In this section I attempt to provide an answer to this question. In general, I argue that the proceduralist’s assumptions about internalism leave his view vulnerable. For in leaving arguments about the content of practical rationality undefended I also show that his view is in fact flawed. Following R. Jay. Wallace in ‘Three Conceptions of Rational Agency’, I describe and motivate a ‘guidance condition’ on practical reasons: a condition that serves as a necessary (though not sufficient) test of the adequacy of a plausible theory of reasons and rationality.⁹⁷ I suggest that a substantivist view of practical rationality, along the lines of what Wallace calls *volitionalism*, can better account for the guidance condition while providing a consistent account of the content of practical rationality. I then conclude setting the stage for the next chapter, where I explore more specifically what the exact process is by which substantive reasons for action are justified, demonstrating more conclusively why we should not be proceduralists about practical rationality and reasons for action. There I employ a study of the content of practical rationality, focusing on a discussion that theories of practical rationality and reasons for action have naturally been led to: the meta-ethical issue of moral reasons for action. Generally, this not only affords a demonstration of what hangs

⁹⁶ Again, some thinkers have also sided with Aristotle on this issue. Nevertheless, my interests here lie with the debate between Kantian and Humean accounts.

⁹⁷ Volitionalism is also helpfully thought of as a version of what Steven Darwall has labeled ‘Autonomist Internalism’, (Darwall, ‘The British Internalists and the Internal Ought’, 16).

on the issues discussed in the previous chapters; this allows me, in the next chapter, to provide a defense of the view I ultimately wish to advocate: substantivist moral rationalism.

6.2 Beyond Internalism: Wallace's Guidance Condition

According to Wallace, many attempts to explain what is involved in agents acting on reasons do not discuss the most important aspect practical rationality of all: what our deliberative reasoning process actually involves. In general, this is because Wallace agrees with Korsgaard's thought that internalism's gate is admittedly wide. He thinks that internalism's gate is so wide that we ought to replace 'internalism' with the expression 'motivational requirement', allowing us to discuss the deeper, more pressing issue concerning practical rationality, i.e., the content of our practical agency. As he says himself,

As formulated above, the motivation requirement specifies that rational agents who grasp that they have reason to do x will be motivated accordingly. But it does not say anything about the connection between the agent's grasp of their reasons and the corresponding motivation. It is important to our conception of persons as rational agents, however, that practical deliberation be correctly related to motivation. In particular, the motivations and actions of rational agents are guided by and responsive to their deliberative reflection about what they have reason to do. Unless this guidance condition (as we may call it) can be satisfied, we will not be able to make sense of the idea that persons are genuine agents, capable of determining what they shall do through the process of deliberation.⁹⁸

Thus a theory of practical rationality must minimally involve a further story about the content of practical reasoning and how we guide our actions. The guidance condition is thus a stipulation on how we are capable of governing our actions. The guidance condition explains that deliberation and choice factor into agency, and not that a motivation is merely a disposition to be pulled to action by our desires.

⁹⁸ Wallace, 'Three Conceptions of Rational Agency', 219.

With the thought that a proper theory of the content of practical rationality must account for guidance, Wallace accordingly takes up the guidance condition in his paper. There he explores three possible views about the nature of rational agency, seeing if any of these views can support the guidance condition. All three of Wallace's views are versions of the ones we have looked at in preceding chapters, save of course, their broader implications: (a) 'Internalism' (minimal proceduralism); (b) 'Meta-Internalism' (moderate proceduralist views); and (c) Volitionalism (which develops Kantian, substantivist themes). As it turns out for Wallace, both internalism and meta-internalism fail to support the guidance condition. Only volitionalism succeeds. Internalism and meta-internalism fail because according to Wallace neither can account for a vital feature of motivation: that sometimes we can intentionally fail to act on good (normative) reasons for action we have; reasons we see we ought to take and therefore can take. As Wallace maintains rightly, this is because a view that explains that we act on the basis of reasons for action, as a result of normative considerations that reflectively guide our choice through decision and choice, must be able to account for us sometimes failing to do those things we ought to do. In other words, a consistent theory of practical rationality must account for our ability to guide our own actions and take responsibility for cases in which we fail to be motivated (guided) by good reasons.

We have already seen why minimal procedural accounts of practical rationality like Hume's fail to meet these guidance and motivational requirements. For, as we saw in the last chapter, Hume cannot account for true irrationality. Hume's extreme empiricism about our agency does not seem to admit that we are even capable of choosing and reasoning about action at all.⁹⁹ Recall that for Hume, explaining motivation comes by seeing that agents

⁹⁹ Section 5.2.

already have desires, and that practical rationality's job is merely to find some way to satisfy our already present desires. Yet the problem with this extremely skeptical account of agency is that it leaves little room for explaining how we are capable of guiding and deliberating about what we want to do; Hume's view seems to say that what we do is not fully within our control. Yet if we are not able to control what it is we do, thinks Wallace, then there is no chance for us to ever be irrational. We will always, it seems, be doing the rational thing. Yet a theory of practical rationality must include a persuasive 'error theory'; it must include an explanation of the precise kind of mistakes we make when we are guilty of practical irrationality. Consequently, theories of practical rationality like Hume's minimal proceduralism do not hold up, because in the end they do not account for normative guidance conditions we evidently are constrained by.

6.2.1 Why Meta-internalism (Moderate Proceduralism) Fails

What about theories of practical rationality that are not so extreme as to deny that practical rationality can supply us with normative constraints on our actions? According to Wallace, 'meta-internalism' is a good example of this kind of view, and is best seen as an improvement on internalist views.

Meta-internalism is the view that our motivational economy is inhabited not only by our first-order desires, wants and preferences, but also by the foundational desire to have it that these desires, wants and preferences are rationally consistent with what it is most rational to do. Hence the 'meta' of meta-internalism points to the meta-desire agents have to be rational. For while meta-internalists are still instrumentalists about practical reasoning, unlike simple internalists, meta-internalists claim that agents are capable of a kind of rational

guidance process.¹⁰⁰ For example, for Smith, agents are capable of being guided by normative considerations because a necessary feature of rational agency is just that agents have a meta-desire to do what they believe their fully rational selves would.¹⁰¹¹⁰² So on Smith's view, because of our basal desire to be rational, guidance and misguidance is just explained in terms of a kind of coherence condition on the beliefs and desires we have and acquire. If I desire to eat eight pounds of ice cream it seems I cannot coherently also have the desire to not gain weight while still desiring to eat the ice cream. To eat eight pounds of ice cream, according to Smith, is probably not something our fully rational selves would desire. Thus our desire to do what we believe our ideal counterpart would do, which for Smith is a constitutive part of being a rational agent, is capable of guiding our actions. The guidance condition therefore appears to be met for the meta-internalist; it appears to allow the meta-internalist to account for cases in which we fail to act on those reasons for action which nevertheless see are the ones we ought to act on (*akrasia*).

So for meta-internalists like Smith, it follows that we need not adopt a view about the content of practical rationality that involves anything more than procedural reasons for action in order to accommodate the guidance condition. For example, suppose that I desire to further my philosophical education in the best way possible, and have the opportunity to choose one which is rated satisfactorily and one which is rated superbly. According to the

¹⁰⁰ It must be pointed out that according to Wallace, meta-internalist views are generally externalist in nature. I find this a very implausible and misleading conception of meta-internalist views like, for example, Smith's moderate Proceduralism. Smith himself advances that he is an internalist and I do not think that he is mistaken: if internalism is just the view that reasons must be capable of motivating us (where the word 'motivating' is deliberately left ambiguous, and just means, as Williams points out, that agents are capable of reaching certain considerations about what they ought to do by deliberating on the contents of one's motivational set, i.e., the set of their "desires, evaluations, attitudes, projects, and so on" (Williams, 'Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame', 35)) then Smith's view about our ability to acquire new desires and criticize current desires through deliberating about what our fully rational self would do certainly boasts itself as a quintessentially internalist view. My dispute with Wallace about the nature of externalism and internalism is discussed further below.

¹⁰¹ Wallace, 'Three Conceptions of Rational Agency', 230.

¹⁰² Smith's version of the basal desire theory is just his view that all action is goal directed. That is, as we discussed previously, Smith's theory is a teleological one: a theory which attempts to show that all actions is directed towards bringing something about, where this involves the satisfaction of a desire.

meta-internalist, the way in which we are capable of having normative constraints on our actions in this example is just to deliberate about which path is most rational, where for Smith it is to deliberate about what our fully rational selves would desire in this case. That is, it involves deliberating about how I am to satisfy the desires I have to be further educated, nothing more.¹⁰³ And because I have the basal desire to choose the path of action that will best do so, I ought to go with the better rated school. Thus according to the meta-internalist it is by means of a procedural process that I am to count my reasons for action as being properly guided by norms of rationality. Thus all that is required in order to satisfy the guidance condition, thinks the meta-internalist, is a procedural view of practical rationality and an allied desire-based view of rational agency.

Wallace points out, however, that moderate proceduralist views of rational guidance are flawed. Wallace's criticisms of meta-internalist views like Smith's center around genuine cases of *akrasia*, where an agent sees that he ought to do X but instead does Y, and does Y while nevertheless recognizing that his reasons for Y are not as good as his reasons for doing X. Wallace thinks that meta-internalists cannot satisfactorily account for akratic cases while still maintaining the guidance condition, and this is just to say that meta-internalists like Smith cannot account for cases of genuine irrationality. I think that Wallace is right. Take the example of *akrasia* I described earlier where I ought to go to the office instead of staying home and watching television. Say I stay home and watch television, and that this is not consistent with my wanting to have a house in which to watch my television, nor is it consistent with my long term goals of retiring early. This is a perfect example of *akrasia*, i.e., an example of a case where I have acted, knowingly, against my better judgment. So to make sense of seeing my akratic action as one which is truly irrational, which the meta-internalist

¹⁰³ Save, of course, making sure that satisfying this desire coheres with the rest of my projects and interests.

does want to do (if he actually wants to stipulate that we do have normative constraints on our actions) the meta-internalist must explain so in terms of his (empiricist) theory that we have the basal desire to do what we ought. Can the meta-internalist explain *akrasia* in a satisfying way?

I do not think that he can. For if I have the basal desire to do what I ought then it is puzzling why in fact I haven't done it. That is, if rational agency is, as Smith maintains, such that we desire to do what we believe is most rational to do, then it is not clear why I have stayed home and watched television instead of going to the office. The specific problem the meta-internalist has in explaining *akrasia* is that he will attempt to say that while I have the disposition to be rational (that is, the basal desire to be motivated to do what I ought do), in akratic situations it is just that my basal desire is not strong enough. Yet by responding in this way, the meta-internalist calls into assumption the very question he wanted to answer in the first place. As Wallace says,

If we interpret the basal disposition to do what one ought as an ordinary psychological state that competes with other states of the agent's for causal influence, then we must conclude that the agent's desire to watch the game was stronger than the disposition to do what they ought. It follows that, in a quite straightforward sense, the *akratic* agent was incapable of acting rationally under the circumstances.¹⁰⁴

In other words, the meta-internalist maintains problematically that either *akrasia* does not exist, thereby falling into the problematic situation we saw skeptical internalists such as Hume in; or he attempts to account for *akrasia*, but then cannot account for the possibility of akratic agents being guided by the reasons they evidently do see they should act on in

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 232. In other words, Wallace's point is that the meta-internalist's account of *akrasia* is problematic and unsatisfying because it fails to account for akratic agents doing the rational thing; it fails to explain how it would be possible for them to otherwise.

spite of their desires to otherwise. Either way moderate proceduralists like Smith are caught in the snare of failing to account for the guidance condition.

6.2.2 Why Volitionalism Succeeds

We are now beginning to see why philosophers who take it that internalism implies a proceduralist view of practical rationality and reasons for action find themselves in trouble. For although proceduralists often take the internalism requirement to imply an undefended content skepticism about practical rationality, Smith's view now faces a problem with its goal directed (teleological) proceduralist motivational claim.¹⁰⁵ For the downfall of Smith's view, and all proceduralist views like it, is that they always leave open the possibility that in akratic situations our agency is thwarted by our desires. In other words, in an akratic situation, it could be that our basal desire to do what we ought to was simply not strong enough to override our desire to do the lesser good. This means that Smith's proceduralism fails to account for the guidance condition, since he cannot actually account for 'true irrationality'. Smith cannot account for true irrationality because he cannot adequately make out the difference between motivated irrationality and compulsion, something a consistent theory of practical rationality evidently needs.

If proceduralist views like Hume's and Smith's views do not in the end account for the guidance condition, what kind of view will? According to Wallace, we need a *volitionalist* account of the content of practical rationality to account for the guidance condition. This is because volitionalism, according to Wallace, makes room for "an important class of motivational states that are directly subject to our immediate control".¹⁰⁶ States which are

¹⁰⁵ I take this point about the mistakenness of Smith's teleological assumptions up in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 236.

directly subject to our immediate control, according to Wallace, are (for example) deliberation and choice. That is, Wallace's volitionalism updates the Kantian thought that we take our actions to be governed by norms which imply a kind of self-determination. For Wallace, it is a vital and indeed constitutive component of our agency that when we deliberate and choose to take certain actions we do so in a way that is directly in our control. That self-determined deliberation and choice are fundamental components of our agency is very intuitive: choosing is not something we are merely subject to, nor are deliberation and reflection. When I for example choose to take a red pill rather than a blue one, I do not do so passively; I do so intentionally.¹⁰⁷ For although we certainly must admit that sometimes we are passive to the psychological events that happen to us, this does not mean that we are always passive to these events. We can take it that, in general, when we are responsible for our actions, we are responsible for them through a kind of self-determination.

According to Wallace, the significance of the volitionalist theory of practical rationality is that through it, we can see how practical rationality is capable of guiding and criticizing our actions: it can account for the guidance condition. As he says, "we need to acknowledge such volitionalist motivations if we are to make sense of reasons for action as norms of reasoning, capable both of guiding our activity through deliberation and of retaining their normative force [criticizing our actions] when such guidance breaks down".¹⁰⁸ That is, since the volitionalist conception of agency advocates that our actions are not merely passively controlled by our desires, but rather that we are in direct control of what we do (including what we desire), it follows that agents should be thought of as choosers that are independent of what they desire. In other words, agency takes place in addition to, and on top of, our desires. As Wallace points out, sometimes, agency must be thought of as

¹⁰⁷ Or, to use different terminology, I 'will' to do so.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 237.

independent of anything “phenomenologically identifiable as desires at all”.¹⁰⁹ Take, for example, the act of thinking about whether I should go to the park or go to the pool.

Although both paths of action may have as their incentives the desire to enjoy some physical activity, the actual act of thinking about what I will do does not experientially represent itself to me as a desire at all. If anything, states like choice and deliberation allow me the possibility of acknowledging that I have desires in the first place.

As a result of this volitionalist view of agency, it is, Wallace argues, possible to explain how agents are capable of acting on norms and principles of rationality despite their desires. For when agents recognize that they ought to do something, phenomenologically and conceptually speaking, they also recognize that it is possible that they can do it.

According to the volitionalist, if I have an extremely strong desire to watch television, because I am distinct from my desires it is still possible for me to recognize that I ought to go to the office. Thus the volitionalist account of agency, unlike internalist and meta-internalist ones, explains cases of *akrasia*. As Wallace says, on the volitionalist picture,

When agents act *akratically*, for instance, it is not merely true of them that they would have done what they believe they ought had they been subject to a different configuration of desires and dispositions...For the Volitionalist capacity for choice is, as we have seen, precisely a capacity to determine what one shall do in ways independent from one’s merely given psychological states.¹¹⁰

We can take this volitionalist point as a direct one against the proceduralist view that a desire to do something constitutes a reason for doing something. For as we now see, having a desire clearly does not constitute a reason for action, at least not in of itself. For although a desire to do something might in the end contribute to our reasons for doing

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 238.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 238.

something, there are also independent constraints on what we have reason to do as a result of practical rationality requiring our reasons for action to be *good ones*.¹¹¹ Cases of *akrasia* suffice to show that our reasons for action must be justified: as we have seen, in cases of *akrasia*, agents act for the sake of their desires despite acknowledging that they ought to do otherwise. Thus a desire alone will not suffice to explain why agents act the way they do, because explaining actions in this way fails to account for *akrasia*.

The proceduralist's attempt to explain actions as being constituted by belief/desire couples therefore fails to tell us whether or not an agent's action are properly guided by constraints of rationality. The proceduralist cannot simply reply to the substantivist that asking for anything more than an internalist/meta-internalist explanation of things is too ambitious a project. This is simply because proceduralist views, as I have been arguing, leave something vitally important out the conception of rational agency: the ability to guide our actions by normative constraints. For example, if I choose to watch television rather than go to the office, while I ought to have gone to the office, nothing in the belief-desire couple 'I desire to be entertained and believe that watching football will entertain me' explains what reason I have for doing so rather than going to the office. What is required in order to make sense of practical decision making is a kind of normative stipulation on reasons for action; a stipulation that they are justified - something the proceduralist cannot do.¹¹²

How then, does the volitionalist explain actions? What does she offer that the Humean psychological model does not? And, finally, how does her view accommodate the guidance condition while still maintaining that there are normative constraints on our

¹¹¹ Again, recalling Kant's stipulation that reasons must be justified ones if we are to count them as reasons at all helps emphasize this point. See section 2.2.1.

¹¹² See footnote 116.

actions? According to the volitionalist account of agency, for example Kant's, agents are capable of guiding their actions by acting on principles and norms of rationality which allow them to see their actions as being in their direct control. That is, rather than merely being passive watchers of what happens to us, for the volitionalist, when we take ourselves to be acting for a reason, we also at the same time take that reason to be one which is justified by rational constraints agents are required to meet. As we may recall, Kant's volitionalist theory of agency claimed that self-determined action requires that we think of ourselves as acting on principles, what he called 'maxims', which take the form "I shall do x, in circumstances C, in order to y/as a way of y-ing."¹¹³ Furthermore, as we began to see with Korsgaard, agents are capable of acting on principles beyond those of instrumental means/end reasoning, demonstrating that agents are capable of acting in ways not solely explained by their dispositions to act to satisfy their desires.¹¹⁴

With our understanding of the volitionalist picture, I think we can now begin to appreciate the full force of the kind of principle-based explanation of actions that is present in Kant's view. For unlike desires, which can best be thought of as dispositions to want certain things, reflecting on principles is capable of omitting and resisting inclinations we might have to act on our desires. If I make it a principle not to smoke for a week, my principle provides me with a way to guide my actions despite my desire to smoke.¹¹⁵ What is important in thinking of our actions as being directed by a principle-based volitionalist account of agency, however, is that it allows that when we fail to guide our actions by such principles (recall the television example) we fail because we ourselves, and not merely our

¹¹³ Ibid, 239. Again, for further explanation of this Kantian point see section 2.2.1 or footnote 92.

¹¹⁴ At least not all of the time. Of course agents act on means/end reasoning and pursue their desires. My claim is just that they do not merely act on these kinds of reasons.

¹¹⁵ Of course I recognize that this does not yet show that principles are capable of supplying us with substantive reasons, but merely that principles are another way of thinking about how we act, one which allows us to explain that does not solely cite our desires.

desires, were responsible for doing so. That I did not go to work is therefore irrational because I did not act on my maxim-based reason which took the form ‘I shall go to work, in circumstances where I need money, in order to keep a roof over my head’, not because of the mere desire to watch television.

6.3 Volitionalism and a Substantivist Conception of Practical Rationality

I now want to tentatively and quickly show that a principle-based, volitionalist conception of rational agency demonstrates that the ‘desire-in, desire-out’ principle has a primitive, incorrect understanding of rational agency.¹¹⁶ For I claim that, sometimes, we have substantive reasons to act that do not cite our desires at all. As I will explain, actions motivated by substantive reasons for action are best explained by what I have called the ‘belief-in, action-out’ principle, making Smith’s ‘desire-in, ‘desire-out’ principle an artifact of a troubled proceduralist view.

6.3.1 What My View does not Claim

I first want to avoid a possible misunderstanding that may arise in attempting to understand my ‘belief-in, action-out’ principle. For it may appear that explaining actions via the ‘belief-in, action-out’ principle is just another way of explaining actions via Smith’s view.¹¹⁷ Yet in explaining actions via the ‘belief-in, action-out principle’ I do not think we need to deliberate about anything close to fully rational agents. Contrary to Smith’s view, I contend that it is an (obvious) empirical fact that we are, as Kant claimed, imperfectly rational agents. That we are imperfectly rational, I think, implies that Smith’s view about

¹¹⁶ Tentatively, because I develop this further in the chapter following this one.

¹¹⁷ Specifically, Smith’s view that our basal desire to act upon our beliefs about what our fully rational selves want is capable of supplying us with normative reasons for action.

agents being capable of being motivated by considerations about what a fully rational agent would believe and want are problematic. Nevertheless, I do not think imperfect rationality rules out the possibility of being rational. For the volitionalist account I have explained thus far suggests that we are capable of enjoying normative constraints on our actions. That is, my view suggests that we are capable of enjoying normative constraints in so far as it asks us to recognize that sometimes, there are things we are rationally required to do; and through principles, we are capable of resisting our desires and doing what we know we ought to do. Thus instead of claiming, as Smith does, that normative constraints on our action come about by hypothesizing what our fully rational selves would desire, the view I wish to espouse is much like Kant's. My view maintains that reason can show us that there are certain things that must be done, and that sometimes the consequences of practical rationality are that we are normatively required to do things that are not based in our wants and desires.

6.3.2 Public Reasons

As I see it, the way to correctly conceive of normative reasons for action is through a substantive account of practical rationality and reasons for action. I argue that substantivism is a product of a volitionalist understanding of agency. The volitionalist's key claim is that rational agency expresses the guidance condition in a distinctive way that is central to our conception of agency. Satisfying the guidance condition requires that self-determined action must be belief-based and not desire-based: action which requires that our reasons be justified. Through this kind of justificatory process I think we can begin to see how agents must not only act on justified reasons they take themselves to have, but that agents must

concede that their own justified reasons are also justified reasons other practically rational agents enjoy (and *vice versa*).

To begin, I do not think that the only reasons we have for action are ‘agent-relative reasons’ - ones we have that do not apply to other agents.¹¹⁸ In other words, I claim that practical rationality is structured so as to also issue what have been called ‘agent-neutral’ reasons. This has been called *the publicity thesis* about normative reasons for action. Although I will discuss it more explicitly in the next chapter, because it is a major component of my substantivism I will suggest why I think it is true here. My argument for why the publicity thesis is true is straightforward: practical rationality is something we all share, and because it is capable of guiding and criticizing our actions it must be thought of as *public* in its legislation. Thinking of practical rationality as being publicly legislative implies that sometimes, in so far as we are rational, a reason for me, if it is a reason at all, is a reason for you, since you and I are both equipped with the capacity to deliberate about what we have reason to do.

Conceiving of normative reasons for action as agent-neutral, public reasons could be easily misunderstood. To begin, the publicity thesis does not suggest that we must all, in so far as actions are concerned, do and think the same thing. If a son’s father is deathly ill, then likely this will constitute a reason for him to visit his father, one which does not depend on the son’s subjective interests in the situation (suppose for example, that you are the son and detest your father). If I were in such a situation, however, this would not then mean that you

¹¹⁸ These terms are borrowed from Korsgaard’s work entitled ‘The Reasons we can Share’, although here I am disagreeing with Korsgaard that there is no sense to be made of agent-relative reasons. For, as Wallace points out, an agent-neutral reason in some situation may still be one that is relative to my agency and not to yours. It is just that the structure of the reason is not relative to my subjective interests, but rather to the standpoint which I am in. For example, I may have an agent-neutral reason to help my friend John out when he is in a hard time, but this is relative to my agency and not to yours. For in general, it does not give you a reason to help John out (although if you had a friend in John’s situation you would also have a reason to help that friend out).

would have to visit my father. You do not know him. Nevertheless, maintaining a publicity thesis about practical rationality and reasons for action does mean that the *reasoning process* that governs how we act and choose is the same. Since the deliberative, justificatory process that takes place before we act is the same, I suggest that it follows that, roughly, my justified reasons for action also constitute justified reasons you have for acting. Let me explain briefly, by way of an example, how the publicity thesis informs our deliberative reasoning processes.

Suppose, for example, that being healthy were an objectively good thing to be (rationally speaking). Since it is objectively good it would seem to follow that all rational agents have an agent-neutral reason to be healthy. This agent-neutral reason would also seem to give you a reason to promote my health and *vice versa*.¹¹⁹ Crucially though, agent-neutral reasons for action do not imply that you and I must perform *the same action* to become healthy and promote health; there are many different ways one can become healthy, and many ways to promote good health. For example, perhaps you choose to bike to work and I choose to run, and perhaps my choosing to run on the street that your office looks out on is a simply way to also promote your health (by you seeing me running and being inspired by this). Thus what we choose to do to meet the justificatory requirements of reasons for action is up to us to decide. Deciding how to meet normative requirements on our actions might involve figuring out which path of action is more *desirable*; it might involve discerning whether or not what is desirable can be justified rationally. If we think about normative constraints and their relationship to desirability we can begin to see how you could have an agent-relative reason to, for example, bike to work, which is based on your agent-neutral

¹¹⁹ For the sake of providing an example, here I opt for a teleological explanation of reason-justification. Although I do not outright disagree with teleological conceptions of justification, it should be pointed out that in the next chapter I criticize views which take it that teleological justification is the only kind of justification our reasons for action can enjoy.

reason to be healthy. Yet the point of the publicity thesis is just that some reasons for action, in virtue of being stipulated by practical rationality - which we do all share - must be thought of as public and not private.

6.3.3 Justification

So then, how do I argue that this view about public reasons shows that we sometimes enjoy substantive reasons and constraints on our actions, ones that are generated by rational insight alone (via beliefs)? Let me explain in more detail how publicity about justifying reasons for action implies substantivism.

As I have mentioned, I claim that when one has a reason to act, one must ensure that it is a rationally justified reason, in so far as it does not violate or contradict any other reasons for action one has. That our actions must be justified can be thought of as a coherence condition on our reasons for action. Seeing that our reasons for action must cohere with one another is a product of the broader constraints of practical rationality itself. More crucially though, unlike Smith, the justificatory process I think we undergo does not consist in understanding what the ideals of rationality are, and then, once understood, acting on them. Rather, the justificatory, deliberative process that I think we undergo when we construct our maxims for action is one that is grounded in thinking about a kind of non-teleological justification I contend sometimes applies to agents.¹²⁰ And in general, a kind of non-teleological justificatory process exists, I maintain, once we begin to think about the existence of other agents who also act on reasons. For in thinking about how our reasons for action are not the only reasons for action that exist we see that sometimes we must act for the sake of another agent's reason and not our own, desire-based reasons. Let me explain.

¹²⁰ I discuss this kind of justification more specifically in the next chapter, more decisively showing that it is the kind of justificatory process we must think of our reasons for action as being constrained by.

In deliberating about what to do, we often have to deliberate about what other agents do. Furthermore, in taking it that you are an agent that deliberates about what to do, I also must concede that you also act on reasons. If we recognize that another agent has a justified reason X to perform some action, then it follows that we too, in virtue of seeing that X is justified, must also recognize that X legitimately applies to us as well.¹²¹ The promotion of health example I gave above shows this: since I must recognize that the promotion of your health is just as much of a reason for action as mine is; I must recognize, non-egoistically, that my promotion of *your* health is also important.¹²² Thus as practically rational agents we must recognize that another agent's justified reason for action also gives us a justified reason for action, one that is normatively required.

What follows from a public conception of reasoning is that there will sometimes be cases where it is required not only that you *recognize* my justified reason for action, but also that you *act* for my reason. In other words, there might be cases where you must act for the sake of my reason and not your own, say, self-interested reason. A reconstruction of Kant's view might help in understanding this. For recall that Kant claimed that substantive reasons exist as a result of other reasons for action that we evidently do have and take seriously. In Chapter One we gave the example of Jim, who needed help from John because he was falling off of a cliff. Kant's claim in such situations was just that John must help Jim simply because if the situations were reversed, he would see that Jim would have a reason to help him out. I am now advocating a view that is similar to Kant's, a view about how reasons for action are not solely based on our desires and interests. My view is thus that there are

¹²¹ I take up this view more explicitly in the next chapter and also consider possible objections to it.

¹²² This view can be easily misunderstood. If you have gained sixty pounds this year alone and I have remained the same, healthy weight, then one might conceive of such a situation as one in which we have different reasons for being healthy. True. You have a subjective interest in becoming healthy, while I have a subjective interest in staying healthy. Nevertheless, both of us still have an objective reason to become and stay healthy apart from the desires we might have.

reasons for action that exist as a product of the justificatory requirements that practical rationality *demand*s we meet.

6.3.4 Substantive Reasons for Action

What does all of this imply? Well, of course to say that agents sometimes act on reasons that are not solely based on their interests, desires and preferences is just to say they sometimes act on reasons which are the result of thoroughly substantive considerations. I do not see how we could rationally deny that sometimes, a reason for you is also a reason for me. What makes reasons in these situations substantive and not merely procedural is that when I act for the sake of your reason and not for my own, I do so because my reasoning process stipulates doing so; even in the absence of having a desire to act upon your reason. For I am motivated to act for the sake of your reason solely through considerations motivated by the inference - from the (justified) belief- that your reasons and my reasons are one and the same.

Perhaps an example of determining what these reasons are, and further, how we are capable of being motivated by substantive reasons will make clear how substantive reasons exist. One example is the test Kant outlines to ensure that our maxims for action are ultimately rationally justified: the process of holding our subjective maxims up to the categorical imperative itself.¹²³ When we formulate a principle for action, we ought to, Kant thinks, ensure that our maxims are rationally consistent. According to Kant, this is done by asking whether or not it is possible that the maxim we are thinking about acting on could be made a universal law of nature; one that all agents could act on without the pain of rational inconsistency. In general, Kant's process of holding our maxims up to the categorical

¹²³ To be sure, this is my own view and not Wallace's.

imperative embodies the precise view I am advocating; Kant's view, like mine, holds that our reasons for action must be rationally consistent in a way that excludes all desires, preferences and wants that I might otherwise have. Also, this kind of consistency is only available to us by thinking of reasons for action as being public, substantive ones.

Admittedly though, there are other ways of thinking about this justificatory process besides Kant's. My concern presently, however, is not exactly what this justificatory process looks like.¹²⁴ Rather, my concern presently is just that this justificatory process is, as a result of the volitionalist theory of agency I have been advocating, a feature of rational agency. That this justificatory process is a constitutive component of our agency is a very intuitive thought: normative reasons for action are generated by seeing that we are justified in doing certain things over others via a deliberative process that is constrained by practical reason. Practical reason is something all agents share simply in terms of their agency itself. As a result of this public conception of reasoning and reasons, for example, John's fully justified reason for action is also Robert's fully justified reason for action. When Robert recognizes that he must act *for the sake of* John's reason despite his own interests he is doing so on the basis of a substantive reason. His reason for action is motivated solely by the belief that John's reason supplies himself with a reason, an action explained by what I have called the 'belief-in, action-out' principle.¹²⁵ Again, actions explained by the 'belief-in, action-out' principle are not, to be sure, to be understood as being motivated by reasons that stipulate that when I have a justified reason to, for example, travel to Europe that you also have a justified reason to Europe. This is to confuse the content of an action the 'belief-in, action-out' principle might explain with the norm a principle stipulates we guide our actions by. In

¹²⁴ This is the concern of chapter Seven.

¹²⁵ I should also note that the substantive reasons I am talking about are not to be confused with Wallace's. Wallace uses the term 'substantive' to explain the content of our actions, where, for example, the content of my reason to go to the store is my going to the store.

acting on substantive norms of rationality, agents pursue the same reasons for action as all other agents, not the same action.

There is also a great advantage to explaining practical agency through a substantive justificatory process. The ‘belief-in, action-out’ principle is capable of making sense of another crucial aspect of our agency that other views do not: the substantive, critical capabilities practical reason has with regards to our reasons for action.¹²⁶ If we do not act on the kind of substantive reasons that I have just described, we thereby intentionally commit an act of irrationality. It is simply inconsistent, in so far as practical rationality is concerned, to hold that a reason we evidently take to have normative significance does not have significance with respect to other agents. For example, if you and I make a promise to one another, then by not up holding my half of the promise (while nevertheless expecting you to) I violate the very conditions (reasons) I expect you to act upon. Thus the reason I now have for holding up the promise is a substantive requirement of practical rationality itself. This kind of reason for action is required in spite of my desires, and is a result of my beliefs about the nature of the practical agreement we hold. Practical reason then, like reasons for action, is best thought of as being substantive in nature.

6.4 Conclusions, and a Minor Disagreement with Wallace

Wallace claims that the kind of volitionalism I have sketched here is externalist. According to Wallace, when agents act for the sake of another agent’s reasons, their motivation for doing so is not reached by deliberating about the contents of (to use

¹²⁶ It is the task of another paper to fully explain what these substantive reasons for action would look like and stipulate. Here I might suggest that many of them would probably look much like the deontological constraints, perfect and imperfect duties Kant describes in his Metaphysics of Morals, and in the next chapter I discuss one type of substantive reasons for action, namely moral reasons for action. Nevertheless, fully accounting for the substantive reasons for action we have, in detail, is not within the scope of this paper.

Williams' terminology for a moment) their subjective motivational set. But of course this is just false. The substantive reasons for action I have just explained are perhaps the most recognizable reasons within one's subjective motivational set. They are a built in, ineliminable feature of one's subjective motivational set. Recognizing that someone who is about to be hit by a train has a justified reason to be saved involves recognizing that they, like you, are a practically rational agent who has a reason to be saved. Furthermore, as Williams himself explains, all that the internalism requires is that agents are capable of reaching reasons for action as a result of thinking about their "desires, evaluations, attitudes, projects, and so on".¹²⁷ To say that this kind of volitionalism is externalist therefore misses the point: volitionalism's explanation of how we sometimes have reasons available that do not make reference to our desires simply means that we are motivated by something else, namely by practical reason (by inferences about reasons for action) itself.

Nevertheless, I hope that it is now clear that this disagreement I have with Wallace about substantive reasons for action is a minor one in what I have already shown to be a (very) ambiguous debate about motivational skepticism. What matters for my purposes is the content skepticism we have seen proceduralists advocating, and furthermore, explaining that our agency is best thought of through a substantivist picture. Specifically I think that our discussion in this chapter has shown that the content skepticism proceduralists advocate is very misguided. For I have provided good reasons for thinking that substantivism about practical rationality and reasons for action is the best way to conceive of our practical agency. This is not to say, to be sure, that substantive reasons are the only kinds of reasons for action. This would be a confusing and crude picture of practical rationality. For of course procedural practical rationality exists; instrumental reasons for action are perhaps the reasons

¹²⁷ Williams, 'Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame', 35

for action we act on most. Nevertheless, the view I have sketched suggests that instrumental reasons can sometimes be criticized by substantive reasons for action, reasons which trump instrumental reasons in virtue of their normative authority over them. Thus the important point we ought to take from this chapter is that recognizing that motivational skepticism rests on a misguided claim about the content of practical rationality leads not only to *the possibility* that substantivism is correct about practical rationality and reasons for action, but rather, that it leads to showing that substantivism *is* correct.

CHAPTER 7: MORAL RATIONALISM

7.1 Substantivism and its Relationship with Moral Rationalism

Having argued for substantivism, I will now explain the justificatory process that generates substantive reasons. Although the discussion of the publicity thesis in the last chapter began to explain how substantive reasons for action are generated, I did not conclusively (or thoroughly) identify the exact methods of justification involved. What remains to be explained, then, is whether substantive reasons for action are, for example, generated by reality claims, by teleological claims or by non-teleological claims.¹²⁸

Showing what justificatory process generates substantive reasons also involves looking briefly at another issue: what metaphysical picture substantive reasons for action might commit us to, simply because issues of justification are often related to broader metaphysical views.¹²⁹ Thus, since there is a direct correlation between justificatory and metaphysical issues, I think it is vitally important that the justification of substantive reasons be metaphysically coherent. If we do not tell a metaphysically coherent story, we may find ourselves stuck with a strange view about justification, one that admits of weird metaphysical entities that we are not willing to accept.¹³⁰

In order to come to grips with the specific way substantive reasons for action are justified, and further, the metaphysical realities they might ask us to commit to, I examine a species of reasons for action that some philosophers have considered substantive: moral reasons for action. For many philosophers have argued - correctly, it seems to me - that

¹²⁸ These three justificatory processes are explained below.

¹²⁹ For example, if I hold the metaphysical view that the world is contained within the mind of god, then my justificatory story about how I can have knowledge of the external world will be different than if I am, say, a realist. The point is that some metaphysical commitments will rule out justificatory ones, and that we have to find a coherent way of having these two issues balance.

¹³⁰ This was J.L. Mackie's chief concern in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. For Mackie could find no way to justify the existence of moral reasons for action, precisely because he could not understand how one could fit these commitments into a coherent metaphysical view.

moral reasons can helpfully be thought of as substantive.¹³¹ In this section I therefore want to take up this view, which is typically referred to as *moral rationalism*. My goal is to briefly consider two representative versions of moral rationalism, so as to conclude with a coherent sketch of the justificatory and metaphysical commitments implied by moral reasons.

I begin with Michael Smith's *Humean moral rationalism*. I suggest that while his theory is metaphysically coherent, his proceduralist account of practical rationality is insufficiently equipped to account for the normative constraints of moral obligation. I then examine Russ Shafer-Landau's *realist moral rationalism*. I suggest that while Shafer-Landau's substantivism seeks to prove the right thing, his metaphysical story about moral reasons being justified by 'moral facts' is counterintuitive and unsatisfying. I then conclude by returning to the view I advocated in the previous chapter, developing it further. I argue that, in a non-teleological fashion, substantive reasons (in this case, moral reasons) are justified by the relations between practically rational agents. I contend that *constructivist moral rationalism* allows agents to have moral constraints on their actions.

7.2 Michael Smith's Moral Rationalism

Although we have already provided a thorough criticism of Smith's moderate proceduralism, I now want to show that proceduralism can never give rise to the kind of constraints we have in virtue of being moral agents. I reconsider Smith's project simply because it is the closest a proceduralist view comes to demonstrating the existence of moral categorical imperatives. After I examine Smith's view, I then provide criticisms of it through Richard Joyce's survey of Smith's work.¹³²

¹³¹ Though perhaps not identically so. Though to be sure, this is the subject of another paper.

¹³² Joyce's overview and criticism of Smith is contained in his [The Myth of Morality](#). To be clear, Joyce's own project is not substantivist, it is in fact the opposite, one that purports to demonstrate that categorical reasons

7.2.1 Smith's View and Criticisms of his Justificatory Claims

Imagine, for a moment, that Smith's proceduralism succeeded and that substantivism was defeated. Pretend that the only reasons we have for action are instrumental ones aimed at satisfying our desires. Recall that according to Smith, thinking about what our idealized counterpart would desire is a process by which we come to see that practical rationality can inform and criticize our actions in a normative and indeed categorical way. Smith also thinks that the categorical imperatives of morality can best be thought of as constraints on practical rationality. Smith's way of showing how morality is helpfully thought of as being a product of practical rationality comes by considering what properties our fully rational selves would have. Specifically, Smith asks how close your fully rational selves' desires would be with my fully rational selves' desires. Given that our fully rational selves both have no false beliefs, and only fully rational desires, Smith thinks it might be relevant to ask, is what is fully rational for me to desire always what it is fully rational for you to desire? Furthermore, if our fully rational selves' desires converged, would this place moral constraints on our interactions with one another?

According to Smith, in so far as we are all practically rational agents that deliberate about what it is most rational to do, what our fully rational selves would desire *would* converge. Smith thinks that agents' fully rational selves desires are identical, and that the moral thing to do is just what is most rational to do; moral impermissibility is best captured by what it is rationally impermissible to do. For Smith because our fully rational selves desire the same things it follows that it is rationally impermissible to violate the reasons you and I both have as a result of our beliefs about what our fully rational selves would desire. It

of any kind do not exist. Yet while my project disagrees with his quite thoroughly, I believe that his criticism of Smith's view nevertheless stands.

would be rationally impermissible because what your fully rational self would desire would also be what mine would, placing coherence conditions on our interactions with each other. It follows, therefore, that I should not do immoral things because doing so violates the very norms of reason I myself guide my own actions by.

Smith's claim that moral constraints are best thought of as constraints of procedural rationality seems somewhat plausible: perhaps our ideal selves would want the same things, thus moral reasons for action are captured by our more general practical reasons for action. Yet does such a proceduralist view of morality actually hold up? Here I want to suggest that procedural moral rationalism does not hold up, decisively showing that normative constraints on our actions cannot be grounded in a proceduralist model of practical rationality and reasons for action.

To show why Smith's view fails, I want to make use of what I think is a fairly conclusive criticism of his view, offered by Richard Joyce in his *The Myth of Morality*. There, Joyce questions whether or not, on Smith's view, a fully rational agent's normative reasons for action would also be his moral reasons. Joyce argues that Smith is mistaken in thinking that "rational agents *as such*...act in accordance...with what they perceive their moral obligations to be".¹³³ For Joyce, we should not think that rational agents would or could act on reasons they perceive their fully rational selves would act on, because according to Joyce, a fully rational agent's desires would not be altered in such a way as to accommodate moral reasons for action. According to Joyce, on Smith's account the "idealized agent" is always "derived from the actual agent", and so what our fully rational selves desire do not converge.¹³⁴ Although a fully rational agent might have different desires than a non-fully rational agent, because the former agent's desires still influence the latter, it

¹³³ Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*, 63.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 63.

would not turn out that moral reasons can best be thought of as rational ones.¹³⁵ Our moral reasons would not be best thought of as rational reasons because according to Joyce, what fully rational selves do is always based on what non-fully rational selves do, thus eliminating the possibility that what our fully rational selves desire converges. Thus according to Joyce, Smith's proceduralist moral rationalism fails; what I am rationally obligated to do is entirely different from what you are rationally obligated to do, doing away with the possibility of anything like the categorical imperatives of morality.

To fully show the force of Joyce's criticism of Smith, take a simple example that is intuitively immoral according to our common sense notions of morality. Suppose that Tommy has to walk two kilometers to school everyday, and on his way to school, there is a bike shop that does not keep their bikes locked up. Seeing this, Tommy considers stealing a bike so that he will not have to walk the two kilometer stretch to school every day. Suppose that Tommy deliberates about what his fully rational self would do and asks himself the following question: would my idealized counterpart, Tommy+, want (desire) to steal the bike? According to Joyce, although the idealized agent would have no false beliefs (rather, he would only have the relevant true beliefs) about the consequences of doing so, it would nevertheless remain that Tommy+ will, or at least could, steal the bike. For Tommy+'s non-fully rational counterpart, Tommy, does in fact desire to steal the bike, and although Tommy's doxastic framework is altered while deliberating about what Tommy+ would do, Tommy's doxastic framework is not the only thing involved in the act of 'deliberating correctly'. For the fully rational counterpart to deliberate properly, he still has to consider what he desires, and his desires are largely influenced by the desires of his non-rational self. So a not-fully-rational-self deliberating about what a fully rational counterpart would do still

¹³⁵ Ibid, 76.

may take the bike, and this shows that moral reasons are not best construed as normative constraints that are the result of the proceduralist view Smith advocates. Although these moral reasons to steal the bike might exist, moral reasons cannot ultimately be thought of as rational reasons we have in virtue of being practical rational (in the proceduralist sense).

We have now, I believe, shown that Smith's moral rationalism fails and that proceduralist views are not capable of capturing what we intuitively think moral reasons involve. For while Smith's moral rationalism is admittedly metaphysically coherent, his teleological model of justification turns out to be problematic. Thus even if we grant Smith that practical rationality is merely procedural, his view still falls short of accounting for what it wishes to prove.

7.3 Shafer-Landau's Realist Moral Rationalism

I now want to turn to seeing whether a moral rationalist account which purports to show that moral reasons are justified by substantivist considerations fares better than a proceduralist account of moral reasons. Here I will turn to the view that, to use J.L. Mackie's phrase, moral reasons are justified by being a "part of the fabric of the world".¹³⁶ In recent work, Russ Shafer-Landau has offered a version of this kind of view: a substantive, moral rationalist account which aims at showing that: (1) categorical reasons for action which are justified independent of agents' wants and desires exist, and do as a result of an independent moral reality, and that (2) if categorical reasons exist then proceduralist views like Smith's are false.¹³⁷ My interests in considering Shafer-Landau's view are simply that the spirit of his

¹³⁶ Mackie, 'Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong', pg 15. Though to be sure, Shafer-Landau's account suggests that they are a part of a fabric of the non-natural world, not the natural one.

¹³⁷ This is also how Shafer-Landau argues that we ought to be non-naturalists about moral properties. Although a discussion of ethical naturalism and non-naturalism is beyond the scope of this paper, as far as I can see, Shafer-Landau is right in endorsing non-naturalism. If moral reasons (substantive reasons) for action are not

substantivist view is akin to my own view. Nevertheless, in this section I want to suggest that the argument he uses to demonstrate these conclusions, namely his view that substantive reasons for action are generated via tracking a non-natural metaphysical reality, is problematic.

7.3.1 Shafer-Landau's Non-Naturalist Moral Realism

According to Shafer-Landau, categorical reasons are “reasons that obtain independently of their relation to an agent’s commitments...reasons [that] do not depend for their existence on their being instrumental to the achievement of any of an agent’s desires, goals or cares”.¹³⁸ In other words, categorical reasons are substantive reasons for action. According to Shafer-Landau, part of the story that demonstrates how categorical reasons can be critical of our actions involves demonstrating how moral reasons for action exist. If moral reasons for action existed, Shafer-Landau thinks, then practical rationality would be capable of criticizing our actions any time we did not act on the moral reasons we should have. Shafer-Landau’s explanation for how moral, substantive reasons exist rests on a series of examples. Here is one of his examples:

Consider a...case...in which a person can very easily rescue another. A child has strayed from her parents on a busy city street, and is about to toddle into the path of an oncoming car. The bystander sees what is happening. He need only reach an arm down to the child to save her from an awful death. Rather than doing so, he watches in delight as the child is run over and killed.¹³⁹

dependant on our desires, like for example, the empiricistic accounts of Hume, Williams and Smith, then it seems that we are not going to be able to say that they are reducible to natural properties, i.e., properties of the natural world. We must, then, be non-naturalist about these kinds of reasons and their properties; we must admit that their existence is independent of the natural world.

¹³⁸ Shafer-Landau, ‘Categorical Reasons’, 189.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 190.

According to Shafer-Landau, the conclusion we are to draw from cases in which agents fail to act on moral reasons they see are justified is that agents' actions in these cases are rationally criticizable. Shafer-Landau says,

If there were nothing to be said against these actions and omissions—no considerations that opposed, extinguished, or overturned the case these agents might make for their cruel conduct— then it is hard to see how their actions could be wrong. But they obviously are wrong. And the sorts of considerations just mentioned— those directly relevant to matters of justification (and, in this particular context, those that indict the agent's cruelty)—are precisely what reasons are. Reasons are, by definition, considerations that favour or oppose, that make something appropriate, legitimate, or justified (or the reverse).¹⁴⁰

Thus for Shafer-Landau, moral reasons are generated through substantive justificatory conditions. Shafer-Landau's explanation of immoral actions sets him up as a moral rationalist about the relationship between moral reasons and practical rationality. As he himself points out, if moral reasons exist, then it follows that "one always has reason to do as morality says", a reason which will seem to trump all of one's other reasons, i.e., one's merely procedural/instrumental reasons.¹⁴¹

Recall that what is crucial for our sake with Shafer-Landau's moral rationalism, however, is the precise process by which he thinks our moral reasons for actions can be thought of as unjustified. So, what is the justificatory process by which Shafer-Landau thinks our actions receive criticism? The justificatory process Shafer-Landau advocates for demonstrating the existence of substantive criticism is much different than the one I began explaining in the last chapter. Shafer-Landau's justificatory process does not admit the existence of substantive or moral reasons for action via a constructivist approach to practical

¹⁴⁰Ibid, 190.

¹⁴¹Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A defense*, 211.

justification. In general, Shafer-Landau's justificatory process does not make use of arguments about rational coherence and consistency. Instead, according to Shafer-Landau, our moral reasons for action are unjustified, and moral rationalism is true, because as it turns out, moral realism is true. According to Shafer-Landau, moral realism is the view that moral statements generally express truths, and that accessing these truths involves "aspiring to, and...succeeding in, representing a philosophical reality not of our own making", a "reality [that] is constituted by a set of truths whose alethic status is independent of our own endorsement of their content".¹⁴² Thus for Shafer-Landau, the moral reality contains truths about the moral status of actions and whether or not certain actions are permissible or forbidden. Thus it follows that I am capable of discerning whether or not a reason for action is a morally justified one, ultimately, by tapping into a moral reality that is independent of our wants, needs and desires.

Shafer-Landau believes moral realism is true because agents have, as a product of deliberation and reasoning, reasons available to them that are foundational, i.e., reasons that are self-evidently justified. According to Shafer-Landau, in those situations where we are morally obligated or forbidden to do something, it is because we have a self-evident moral reason to act or refrain from acting. Perhaps the most obvious example, Shafer-Landau thinks, is the self-evident moral reason we have to not deliberately cause others pain. According to Shafer-Landau, "first, and fairly obviously, even if all real people in the real world do have at least some ends that would be served by avoiding cruelty, we can imagine a possible world in which our misanthrope does not".¹⁴³ Thus while the immoralist might try and argue that these moral reasons are really just instrumental reasons we have for furthering our own interests, thus falsifying any sort of substantive theory of reasons, Shafer-Landau

¹⁴²Ibid, 214.

¹⁴³ Shafer-Landau, 'Categorical Reasons', 191.

suggests that this argument is not a good one. According to Shafer-Landau, we could imagine a world in which the instrumentalist has no reasons at all for furthering his own interests: a world in which no instrumental reasons existed. In this world, Shafer-Landau claims, the instrumentalist and immoralist would still see that there are reasons available to him (perhaps much more clearly). The immoralist would still see that there are reasons available to him because he would see his moral reasons for action: self-evident reasons that are the product of an independent reality we have access to.

Thus the argument is:

- (1) If there are reasons for dedicated immoralists to refrain from their evil deeds, then practical instrumentalism is false.
- (2) There are such reasons.
- (3) Therefore practical instrumentalism is false.¹⁴⁴

According to Shafer-Landau though, even if the instrumentalist has heard this argument, he might object that we have done some question begging. Specifically, he might object to premise two disagreeing that we really have shown that moral reasons for action exist. According to Shafer-Landau, arguments which conclusively demonstrate the existence of moral truths are admittedly hard to come by. For although we have provided (above) a very intuitive argument for moral reasons exist, and can continue to provide others, at some point if the objector to moral realism and moral reasons for action does not agree we will have no way to proceed. Thus, according to Shafer-Landau, we must admit that “begging a question is sometimes unavoidable” and that doing so is sometimes a justified move to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 191..

make.¹⁴⁵ A (somewhat) non-moral example may help. Consider Shafer-Landau's example of a situation in which I am imprisoned on false charges. Suppose I know, based on my privileged access to the contents of my own mind, that the charges are false. In such a situation, Shafer-Landau thinks, "I am justified in believing myself innocent, even if all publicly available evidence convinces everyone else of the justice of the sentence".¹⁴⁶

According to Shafer-Landau, while I may be begging a question here (namely whether or not the evidence suggests that I did it) I am permitted to do so because the privileged access of my situation provides me with justification for believing that I am innocent.

Thus Shafer-Landau thinks that our moral reasons for action, which are based on our privileged access to an independent reality of moral facts, might sometimes unavoidably beg a question if objected to by anti-categorical reasons theorists. As he points out, "it is hard to avoid begging a question if one encounters someone who denies that pain is ever bad, or denies that there is anything immoral about humiliating vulnerable innocents".¹⁴⁷ It is hard to avoid begging a question sometimes, because for Shafer-Landau, it is a self-evident truth that things like murder and stealing are wrong.

7.3.2 Problems with Shafer-Landau's Justificatory Process: the Implausibility of his Moral Realism

Shafer-Landau's moral realism would certainly help out the current task I have set: namely, the task of explaining the metaphysical and justificatory status of substantive reasons

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 192.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 193.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 193.

for action. Furthermore, Shafer-Landau's moral realism attempts to show that the proceduralist is false in thinking that desire-based reasons for action are the only ones we have, also sharing this substantivist claim about reasons with my view. Yet while I am sympathetic to Shafer-Landau's project, I now nevertheless want to suggest that Shafer-Landau's metaphysical picture is too problematic to accept.

My worries with Shafer-Landau's argument are his moral realist and moral epistemological claims. In general, I think that Shafer-Landau's view concerning the metaphysics of moral reasons seeks to show too much while nevertheless failing to account for a very real phenomenon our moral reality exhibits: the often espoused counterexample to objectivist moral theories, widespread moral disagreement.¹⁴⁸ For if, as Shafer-Landau thinks, an independent, yet trackable moral reality exists for agents capable of understanding and making intelligible reasons for action, those agents ought to be able to discern whether or not a reason for action is a good one. If I am capable of accessing an independent reality of moral facts, it should be easy for me to discern whether or not murder is wrong.

What I want to suggest, however, is that Shafer-Landau's moral realism is the wrong way to look at our moral practices. In general I think his moral realism is an erroneous way of viewing practical agency. For it is often very hard to figure out what the right thing to do is: it is not evidently true whether murder is right or wrong, whether lying is wrong, or whether or not suicide is permissible. One component of the existence of so much widespread moral disagreement is just that it is not at all self-evident what normative constraints we have on our agency.¹⁴⁹ Thus Shafer-Landau's moral epistemological claim about how we are capable of accessing a moral reality through self-evidence needs a better

¹⁴⁸ What J.L. Mackie called the 'argument from queerness' in his seminal [Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong](#).

¹⁴⁹ Which is not to say, of course, that they do not exist, but rather, that the way in which they come about is a process that requires deliberation.

explanation of how exactly we are to do so. For if Shafer-Landau wishes to show that an independent moral reality exists, he will have to show, more conclusively, why we suffer a lack of knowledge concerning a non-natural moral reality.

I do not think that this criticism rules out moral realism. I do not have an argument showing that. What I do think it shows is that Shafer-Landau's moral realism, if it is to be taken seriously, is in need of some serious adjustments metaphysically and epistemologically. What stands for the moral realist to show is how things like 'moral facts' can exist; how it is possible that non-natural entities are capable of bearing the burden of truth. Appeal to self-evidence might sometimes be okay if it were not for the lack of a justificatory story about how we are to make sense of and explain the moral reasons for action we apparently do have. Admittedly, the substantivist view of reasons for action I argued for in the last chapter might eventually bottom out in proposals where we must beg a question. But what is not lacking on my substantivist view and the justificatory process that accompanies it is how we are to explain and justify our reasons claims to ourselves and, more crucially, to others. For although murder might be obviously wrong to me, it might not be to you. If murder actually *is* wrong, it does not seem that Shafer-Landau's view will allow me to demonstrate its wrongness to you: if you do not see that then perhaps your moral compass is just broken. Yet because a 'broken-compass' view of our moral psychology is simply not a good way to look at morality, nor a good way to show that moral rationalism is true, it is one we ought to abandon.

7.4 Justifying Moral Reasons in a Metaphysically Coherent way

Seeing that neither Smith nor Shaffer-Landau's view end up showing how moral reasons for action are justified, it might be thought that there is nowhere for us to turn to

explain them. I do not think we need to entertain such a worry. In this last section I want to continue with a volitionalist understanding of agency, seeing practical reason as publicly legislative in nature. Here I want to recall and explain in more detail the publicity thesis: the view that the only normative reasons we have for action are public ones we share.

Continuing with my previous thoughts, I now want to suggest that through the publicity thesis, substantive reasons like moral reasons are capable of buying the smallest amount of metaphysical commitments possible.¹⁵⁰ In basing moral reasons for action explicitly on a volitionalist, publicity thesis, I think it is possible to show that the existence of moral reasons for action depends on the structure of relations that obtain between agents. Specifically, I think substantive reasons like moral reasons are generated through what has been called ‘non-teleological’ justificatory constraints that obtain through agents’ deliberating about each other’s reasons and actions.

7.4.1 The Publicity Thesis

Before demonstrating that moral rationalism is a product of the publicity thesis, let me first capture the essence of its claim in a more explicit way. The publicity thesis is perhaps best expressed by Wallace, where he says that “normative reasons are by their nature public; their normative force, in other words, extends across different agents. Thus if considerations C provide me with reason to do X, then they equally provide other people with corresponding reasons for action”.¹⁵¹ Thus the publicity thesis targets how reasons for

¹⁵⁰ Although space does permit a compare and contrast with Thomas Scanlon’s views here, it is perhaps helpful for me to point out that the view I advocate here is very much like his. For, as R. Jay. Wallace points out, the leading idea for Scanlon “is that moral reflection is”...essentially concerned with what we can justify to other people”, that “thinking about right and wrong is, at the most basic level thinking about what could be justified to others on grounds that they, if appropriately motivated, could not reasonably reject” (Wallace, ‘Scanlon’s Contractualism’, 430).

¹⁵¹ Wallace, ‘The Publicity of Reasons’, 471.

action must be thought of as agent-neutral ones, which, if they are justified, apply to all rational agents.

According to Wallace, the justificatory process by which substantive reasons like moral reasons are generated, and by which the publicity thesis is made true, is a non-teleological one. However, to explain why a non-teleological theory of justification is required to explain our actions and agency, an explanation of the difference between teleological and non-teleological understandings of the justificatory process involved in acting for reasons is first required. A teleological model of justification explains that our reasons are justified by what our actions aim at bringing about. An example of a teleological model, as we have already discussed, is Smith's proceduralism. Proceduralist models of reasons and rationality are usually, if not always, teleological in structure. In general, what makes proceduralism teleological is just that in so far as the satisfaction of desires is concerned, proceduralism aims at bring some state of affairs about.¹⁵² A non-teleological model, by contrast, is one which admits that sometimes, our reasons for action are not directed at "bringing about intrinsically valuable states of affairs" but rather identify a "feature of the action to be performed" as the thing agents should focus on.¹⁵³ An example of a non-teleological view of practical justification is the substantivist one I have been advocating. To elaborate, my theory of practical justification contends that, sometimes, we have reasons for action which are normatively justified but are not necessarily focused on bringing about any states of affairs at all.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² An example might help. Take the consequentialist thought that the good is something that we must bring about: that there is state of affairs in the world that is intrinsically good and that we must work towards to achieve. On such a view, actions would be justified by whether or not they contributed to this state of affairs coming about or not.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 474.

¹⁵⁴ In general, the background story here is that teleological justificatory stories are typically consequentialist theories and non-teleological ones are deontological theories. If it is useful, the view I am defending, because it suggests that there are more things valuable – more reasons to act upon than simply those which promote

With a better understanding of the difference between non-teleological models and teleological models of practical justification, we can now come to understand why substantive moral rationalism requires a non-teleological model. According to Wallace, teleological models of practical justification, although accounting for the publicity thesis, pervert our ordinary understanding of acting for reasons. On a teleological conception of justification, one by which an agent's reasons for actions are ultimately aimed at bringing about, say, some intrinsically good state of affairs, it would still follow that if John has a reason to bring X about, then so does Robert. They would have an agent-neutral reason, a reason that, because is rationally justified, applies to both of them (and everyone else) for bringing this state of affairs about. Thus teleological theories are capable of demonstrating that normative reasons are public, something I have claimed makes moral rationalism true.

The problem with thinking about acting on reasons in a solely teleological way, however, is that doing so does not seem to account for what Wallace calls "the special cases".¹⁵⁵ In general, the special cases, according to Wallace, are simply those cases in which the explanations we give of an agent's actions are distorted if we do not provide non-teleological explanations of how their reasons were justified. For example, it would sound very odd and counterintuitive to explain that the reason I have to, say, help my friend out when he is in need, is based on promoting some intrinsic good state of affairs. The reason I help my friend, it seems, is better explained by the way in which this action is simply required of me as a result of substantive considerations. Thus because teleological explanations are not the way we explain the special cases (e.g., cases where we our help out friend out) it follows that we at least sometimes need a non-teleological explanation of the

"states of the world in which these things are missing" – is one which sides with the deontological approach to problems of value (ibid, 474).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 474.

justificatory process that takes place when we act for reasons. That is, we need an explanation of practical justification which suggests that sometimes, reasons for action are done solely for the sake of substantive considerations we have in virtue of our agency and its relations with others.

According to Wallace, a non-teleological model of practical reasoning demonstrates that the publicity thesis is true in a much more coherent way. The publicity thesis is true, claims Wallace, in virtue of its being a product of the process of deliberation that all agents undergo before they act. To explain this, Wallace espouses what he thinks is something evidently true about our deliberative agency, what he calls the ‘priority of deliberative judgment’ by saying that,

[T]he theory of practical reason must take seriously the content of the first-order judgments that we endorse and have confidence in when we deliberate about what to do. Such judgments are not to be treated as mere pieces of phenomenological biography, which it is the task of philosophical reflection to explain in causal terms. Rather such reflection is answerable to the content of the claims we endorse in deliberation, which should be taken as authoritative characterizations of the nature of our reasons for action.¹⁵⁶

Thus, according to Wallace, because the process of deliberation involves non-teleological considerations, this in turn implies that it also involves substantive considerations, ones which constrain and guide our actions.¹⁵⁷ By identifying these substantive constraints, Wallace says, we can see how the reasons for action that practical rationality is capable of providing us with are not just agent-relative reasons, but also agent-neutral reasons, i.e.,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 484.

¹⁵⁷ This ties together several points I have emphasized in previous chapters. First, it makes use of the thought that there are guidance conditions on rational agency (Chapter Six), such that if we are to be thought of as self-determining agents we must also think of selves as being capable of guiding ourselves by principles and norms. Furthermore, it ties together Kant’s point (Chapter Two) that sometimes I am not merely compelled (motivated) to act by considerations of self-interest. Kant’s point was that if reasons are justified for me, then they are also justified for you, regardless of our interests.

public reasons.¹⁵⁸ For example, when we see through deliberation that certain actions are justified or unjustified for other persons, we thereby must also accept that these reasons should also apply to us too. This is an example of a substantive reason for action that is generated through a public model of rational justification. Other substantive reasons that are generated publicly are, for example, reasons that are the result of cases in which justified reasons for action suggest that your reason for helping out another may also provide me (and others) reasons to not interfere with you helping that person. As Wallace points out, “those cases in which we take S to have reason to do X seem precisely to be cases in which we judge ourselves to be subject to a *pro tanto* requirement of noninterference in S’s X-ing”.¹⁵⁹ Further, if I recognize that you have a right to be helped in situations of need, then it follows that others may have reasons to not interfere with this project I now have.

7.4.2 A Possible Objection

I will now consider a possible undermining objection to the publicity thesis. Raymond Geuss points out, in response to the publicity thesis, that while I may clearly see that I have justified reasons for action, and may also see that you have the same justified reasons for action, I might not have justified reasons for action to act for the sake of yours.¹⁶⁰ The objection attempts to isolate the justificatory features of our actions and show that our reasons for action are independent of one another.

¹⁵⁸ Again, this does not mean that our agent-neutral reasons are not agent-relative in another, important sense. My agent-neutral reasons for going to school in my situation might not give you reasons to go to school and further your education. They are agent-relative in so far as they partly depend upon the situations we are in. But reasons, say, that ask we promote our own talents are agent-neutral in so far as they ask that, whatever our talents are, we ought to promote them. And although it is a separate matter, it should not be misunderstood that these normative considerations be thought of through a teleological justificatory picture. This is because considerations of, for example, promoting one’s self interests are not about bringing anything about necessarily, but instead, are about the intrinsic goodness of the actions which seek to do so itself.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 485.

¹⁶⁰ Geuss’ objection is in Korsgaard’s ‘[The Sources of Normativity](#)’, pg 197-99.

While compelling I do not think Geuss' objection succeeds. The skewed picture of justification Geuss advocates, if held, would also threaten the kind of justification that is thought of as basic in certain circles of theoretical philosophy.¹⁶¹ Let me explain by way of an analogy between theoretical and practical reasoning. Take the justified belief that you and I have that it is raining. Suppose my belief is based on me seeing that it is raining, and yours is based on you feeling (you are standing outside, in the rain) that it is raining. Since both of us have (arguably) reached these beliefs through some theoretical justificatory process, this shows first that both of us are capable of understanding reasons for belief through some justificatory process. Second however, to push the analogy between practical reason and theoretical reason further, if you explain how you arrived at your belief that it is raining it should follow that I have good reason to accept that you have justification for your belief. In its practical analogue, this is Geuss' stipulation that I can recognize that others have reasons for action that are not my own.

According to Geuss however, this is as far as reasons and justification for reasons can go. I disagree, for continuing with the analogy between practical and theoretical reason, there is also another vitally important justificatory process (a public one) that is important to theoretical reasoning. It is a justificatory process that is basic to most accounts of what justification is in epistemology, one so basic that rejecting it would perhaps threaten our ability to make sense of one another's justified beliefs. Suppose, to return to the example, that after some time it has stopped raining and both of us recognize that this is so. Hours later though, you go for a walk and upon returning tell me that it has begun raining again. Here you begin to offer me reasons for why I ought to believe that it is raining, since I no longer have the belief I did before that it is raining. The possibility that you can eventually

¹⁶¹ That is, in epistemology.

convince me (through offering justified reasons for your beliefs) that it is raining, which I think most of us want to admit is possible, suggests that my justificatory process and yours share similarities; namely that we are both capable of understanding what is and is not a good reason. That you can convince me to believe (justifiably) that it is raining, however, shows that this justificatory process is not limited to me merely accepting that you have a justified belief. Rather, in now believing that it is raining, I thereby have accepted that your reason (your justification) for believing can also be mine. Yet this suggests that what it takes to have a good reason to believe something is not an isolated process agents undergo independent of one another; it encompasses the possibility that I can be convinced by your reason for believing.

In both theoretical and practical episodes of justifying reasons, justification cannot be thought of as merely agent-relative. Rather, because justification is best understood as a rational process by which we judge whether or not reasons are coherent and consistent, justification can (at least sometimes) be thought of as public and agent-neutral. If this is right I do not see how it is possible that a justified reason you have does not also provide me a motivation to act for that reason. In some cases this reason might best be thought of as the very *same* reason. Thus Geuss' criticism loses its force, precisely because it fails to understand the nature of the justificatory process involved in reasoning about reasons. Geuss' criticism fails to understand the justificatory process involved in reasoning about reasons because in a situation in which you have a justified reason, one which I recognize entitles you to ask for my assistance, I am required (if, for example such a reason was a moral reason) to act on the reason you are giving me. I am required to act on the reason you are giving me as a result of the justificatory process that reasoning involves; i.e., the process that is involved in acting for reasons in the first place.

7.4.3 What the Publicity Thesis Demonstrates

Now that I have explained and defended the publicity thesis in more detail, let me move on to showing its consequences for moral theorizing and its relationship with the substantivism I have defended. In general, what the publicity thesis shows, I think, is that moral reasons for action are best thought of as a species of the substantive considerations of practical rationality. What Wallace calls the right to ‘non-interference’ is a perfect example of moral reasons for action so construed as substantive reasons for action. As Wallace says, the moral right agents have to not be interfered with is best thought of as a substantive requirement of practical rationality because

Many of the central moral prohibitions, after all, can be construed as bans on interfering with the legitimate projects and activities of others. Thus murder, torture, torment, coercion, manipulation, and deception are all ways of interfering with other people as they pursue their aims and goals, and morality, on virtually any interpretation of it, clearly incorporates...a...requirement not to engage in these forms of behavior.¹⁶²

Thus moral considerations are substantive considerations because what is morally wrong is categorically wrong, and it is by seeing that moral reasons are inspired by obligations we have as a result of being practical rational agents who act for reasons. For example, since the non-teleological justificatory process agents sometimes undergo when they decide what to do is the same, then if I have (suppose) a justified reason for action not to do something, say murder my father, it also follows that you likewise have a justified reason not to murder your father. We might explain this situation by saying that my justified reason for not murdering my father is based on his right to not be interfered with, and that your reason for not

¹⁶² Ibid, 487.

murdering my father is also based on his right to non-interference. It is just that your reason not to interfere is generated by recognizing that I have a justified reason not to interfere first.

My view also explains that substantive reasons for action, which we are practically obligated to be responsive to, can help us think about moral obligatory reasons. When I recognize that you have a justified reason for me to help you out (what Wallace calls ‘the special cases’), it follows that my substantive considerations that are the result of constraints we enjoy through being practically rational oblige me to do so. Moral obligation can therefore be thought of as a kind of rational obligation, because morally obligatory reasons that stipulate that we must do some action X are best thought of as practically obligatory reasons which stipulate that we do X. Thus like the relationship between moral and practical impermissibility, so too do moral and practical obligation share a close relationship.

My non-teleological model of justification also explains, unlike Shafer-Landau’s moral rationalism, widespread moral disagreement. If you and I do not see eye to eye about what we must do this may just mean that, rationally speaking, one of us is not justified in our reason for action. If you do not see that murder is wrong and I do, then it is probably a result of you (or I, or both) having mistaken beliefs about the matter. Yet perhaps more to the point, what we might say about the process involved in justifying one’s actions is that it simply a hard one. The process of justifying our reasons and actions requires serious deliberation. As Aristotle correctly pointed out, acting for the right reasons requires a life of thorough contemplation.¹⁶³ Moral disagreement is not evidence of relativism or moral skepticism being true. Rather, moral disagreement is simply evidence that we are imperfectly rational agents who, at best, are capable of acknowledging that there are certain reasons for action we must act on.

¹⁶³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.

7.5 Conclusions

We can now conclude by saying that the non-teleological justificatory process I have sketched, along with its relationship with the publicity thesis, show that the metaphysical picture that substantive reasons for action requires is a very minimalistic one. In general, this is because substantive reasons like moral reasons are simply a property of our practical relations. Deliberators who act on norms and principles guided by rationality, sometimes, must take reasons for action that are substantive and morally relevant, i.e., not merely directed at satisfying their desires. This non-teleological process is a very real one that occurs and informs our everyday decisions; it does not require us to postulate the existence of a metaphysically robust reality of moral properties, nor does it require us to postulate the existence of fully rational agents. What this justificatory process that I have advocated asks, rather, is that we be consistent with our projects and commitments - with our reasons - and that, in general, we ensure that our reasons for action are justified ones.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have offered arguments for thinking that practical rationality is best thought of as being substantive in nature. That practical rationality is substantive in nature does not mean, however, that proceduralism about practical rationality is strictly wrong. What this means is that, in so far as proceduralism maintains that the only reasons we have for action are ones aimed at instrumentally satisfying our desires, proceduralism is incomplete. For what we have seen is that the view of practical rationality which best captures the essential features of rational agency is one which stipulates that we must think of ourselves as being constrained by substantive, normative constraints supplied by practical reason itself.

Recall the question we began with: ‘what do we have reason to do?’ Through our substantivist conception of agency, I think we can now provide a satisfying answer to this question about what we have reason to do. First we may answer quite generally, that we have different types of reasons to do different things. For example, sometimes we have reasons, legitimately justified ones, to pursue what we want to pursue: to satisfy our desires. Yet sometimes we may also have normative constraints on these reasons, such that we are not justified in solely pursuing the satisfaction of our desires. These considerations, I have suggested, are exemplified in the substantive constraints we intuitively think we have in virtue of being moral agents. For, according to a volitionalist conception of practical rationality that takes the publicity thesis seriously, the categorical constraints of morality are best thought of as a species of the broader categorical constraints of practical rationality. Thus to answer the question of what we have reason to do more specifically: we have reason to do that which is justified by the substantive conception of agency I have sketched.

Suppose that what I have shown here is right. What follows? Anticipating the future of the substantivist project is a very hard thing to do; it is simply not within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, let me say this: the task the substantivist about practical rationality and moral deliberation might now have as a result of what I have demonstrated is that of providing a more specific rubric of the constraints and obligations substantivism implies. My intuitions are that this rubric will likely turn out to look like what Kant thought it would (although it will probably not be identical to his): that agents enjoy substantive constraints on specific action types like promise breaking, lying, murdering and in general, act types that disrespect other agents. But of course as I have just said, that is the task of another paper or thesis.

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