

RATIONALITY AND RESPONDING TO NORMATIVE REASONS

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THE REASONS-RESPONSIVENESS theory of rationality holds that rationality is a matter of responding correctly to one's normative reasons.¹ According to this theory, you are rationally criticizable (that is, you are not fully rational) when one of your attitudes is not a correct response to your normative reasons.² Moreover, it is metaphysically impossible that you respond correctly to your normative reasons while still being rationally criticizable. There is nothing more to rationality than responding to normative reasons.³

Associating rationality with normative reasons, reasons-responsiveness theory promises to vindicate an interesting claim about the normative significance of rationality. Since the balance of normative reasons determines both what you ought to do and what you are rationally required to do, then what

- 1 Among the proponents of a reasons-responsiveness account of rationality are Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"; Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation"; Schroeder, "Means-End Coherence, Stringency and Subjective Reasons"; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*; and Lord, "The Coherent and the Rational" and *The Importance of Being Rational*.
- 2 A normative reason is commonly understood to be a consideration that counts in favor of a response. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. It is also widely assumed that a consideration that is a normative reason for an agent to respond in a certain way is a fact or true proposition. See Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility*; and Broome, "Reasons."
- 3 In contrast, structuralism about rationality holds that rationality is fundamentally a matter of satisfying structural requirements of rationality. See Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*. These requirements include the consistency requirements on beliefs and intentions, the instrumental requirement to intend to do what one believes that is a necessary means for her intended ends, and the enkratic requirement, which requires you to act in accordance with your all-things-considered normative judgment about what you ought to do. Some authors have argued that there are two distinct phenomena under the name "rationality." See Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence" and *Fitting Things Together*; Fogal, "Rational Requirements and the Primacy of Pressure"; and Fogal and Worsnip, "Which Reasons?" Structural rationality is a matter of satisfying structural requirements of coherence, and substantive rationality is a matter of responding to normative reasons. In this paper, I take issue with a unificationist reasons-responsiveness theory that holds that rationality simpliciter is only a matter of responding to reasons.

you are rationally required to do would always be the same thing as what you ought to do. By a similar reasoning, we can show that rational permissibility and normative permissibility are one and the same thing. This thesis is called the *Strong Normativity of Rationality*.⁴

Although it is an elegant theory, in recent decades, many philosophers have argued against the reasons-responsiveness account by providing counterexamples that purport to show that this theory cannot explain the irrationality of incoherent attitudes.⁵ Typically, the focus has been cases in which one is rationally criticizable for being akratically or instrumentally incoherent. Below is an example of akratic irrationality.⁶

Akratic Irrationality: The stuff in the glass in front of Bernard looks and smells like gin and tonic and has been served to Bernard in response to his request for a gin and tonic. Bernard is thirsty and badly wants to drink a gin and tonic. Deliberating on all these, he rationally comes to believe that he has decisive reason to drink what is in the glass. Given the intuitive rationality of Bernard's normative judgment, reasons-responsiveness theory would predict that Bernard's belief is a proper response to his normative reasons. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to Bernard, the glass contains petrol, and arguably, this fact provides him with a strong reason against drinking the contents of the glass. After all, Bernard wants to drink a gin and tonic, and he has every reason to avoid drinking petrol.

- 4 On the other hand, the Weak Normativity of Rationality states that whenever you are rationally required to ϕ , you have some reason to ϕ , but this reason is not always overriding, and there are possible situations where what you are rationally required to do and what you ought to do might come apart. Similarly, according to the Weak Normativity of Rationality, what you are rationally permitted to do might diverge from what you are normatively permitted to do. According to the Special Normativity of Rationality, whenever you are rationally required to ϕ , then this fact about rationality is—or gives you—a normative reason to ϕ . The latter idea is what Broome calls the thesis of the Normativity of Rationality. See Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, 192. See also Worsnip, "Making Space for the Normativity of Coherence." Proponents of reasons-responsiveness theory typically reject the Broomean idea of the special normativity of rationality because according to the reasons-responsiveness view, rationality is not an independent source of normative requirements or normative reasons, but its requirements are ultimately grounded on normative reasons of different kinds like prudence, morality, evidence, etc.
- 5 Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning and Normativity*, *Rationality and Reasoning*; Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence" and "Reasons, Rationality, Reasoning"; Fogal, "Rational Requirements and the Primacy of Pressure"; Fogal and Worsnip, "Which Reasons?"; Brunero, *Instrumental Rationality*; and Lee, "The Independence of Coherence."
- 6 For similar examples, see Fogal and Worsnip, "Which Reasons?"; and Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, 104–5.

So, at least *prima facie*, it would be plausible to say that Bernard has decisive reason to refrain from drinking from his glass.

If Bernard were to respond correctly to all his normative reasons, he would end up at irrationality. By responding to his decisive normative reason, he would refrain from doing what he himself rationally believes he ought to do. But presumably, it is a necessary condition for being fully rational that one at least intends to do what one rationally believes one has decisive reason to do.⁷ The example allegedly shows that not every case of irrationality is explainable in terms of one's failure in responding correctly to the balance of one's normative reasons.⁸

In response, the standard maneuver for reasons-responsiveness theorists is to appeal to a highly plausible distinction, which goes back to Aristotle and lies at the center of Kant's account of the moral worth of actions, between *acting in accordance with* normative reasons and *responding to* normative reasons.⁹ The rough idea is that an agent's action is a response to her normative reasons just in case she performs the action *in virtue of* the fact that she has those normative reasons. That is, there must be an explanatory connection between the agent's action and the normative fact that her reasons support performing that action. In the above example, Bernard is rationally criticizable for acting against his rational normative judgment if his action is not a genuine response to his normative reasons. After all, Bernard does not know that the glass contains petrol. If he is not aware of the latter fact, there cannot be an explanatory connection between his action (refraining from drinking the glass) and the normative significance of the fact that the glass contains petrol. Thus, Bernard fails to respond to his reasons, and that explains why he is irrational.

- 7 Notice that this example does not straightforwardly indicate that rationality has structural requirements. Of course, one possible explanation is to appeal to the enkratic requirement of rationality that requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do. But this is not the only explanation, and one might try to provide an alternative explanation of the same phenomena without appealing to the "requirements" of rationality. See Fogal, "On the Scope, Jurisdiction, and Application of Rationality and the Law."
- 8 The idea is that, according to the reasons-responsiveness view, whenever you are irrational for having an incoherent combination of mental attitudes, at least one of those attitudes is not a correct response to your reasons. In other words, in cases of irrational incoherence, there is nothing especially wrong about the combination. Thus, in explaining cases of incoherence, the reasons-responsiveness view either argues that one of the attitudes is normatively deficient or tries to explain the apparent irrationality away. This latter strategy is the standard maneuver for the preface and lottery cases. See Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 51–55; and Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 254, 257. In what follows, I will discuss and argue the insufficiency of both strategies.
- 9 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 217–22.

Generally, the reasons that can contribute to determining what an agent is rationally required to do (and what she ought to do) consist of the ones that the agent is able to respond to in this demanding sense of responding to reasons, which requires the existence of an explanatory relation between her performance and the normative fact that her reasons support that performance. In a technical term, only the reasons that she *possesses* can determine what is rational for her to do. Again, since Bernard does not possess the fact that the glass contains petrol, this fact cannot make it rational for him to refrain from drinking from the glass.

My aim in this paper is to show that even this perspectivist maneuver fails to explain the intuitive irrationality of practical akrasia.¹⁰ To explain the irrationality of practical akrasia (that is, the irrational mismatch between believing that you ought to ϕ and lacking an intention to ϕ), proponents of the reasons-responsiveness view argue that whenever such a mismatch is irrational, it is either because you possess decisive reason to give up your belief that you ought to ϕ or because you possess decisive reason to intend to ϕ . My central argument against the reasons-responsiveness account is to show that there can be situations in which your possessed reasons permit you to believe that you ought to ϕ while simultaneously you possess sufficient reasons not to intend ϕ . In such situations, the reasons-responsiveness view allows for an irrational mismatch between believing that you ought to ϕ and lacking an intention to ϕ . The main premise of my argument is that the possession of a normative reason for action does not guarantee that there is available evidence for being subject to that reason. Consequently, one can possess a reason to act without being in a position to know that one possesses that reason.¹¹

The plan of the paper is as follows. First, in section 1, I argue that the best explanation of the distinction between acting in accordance with a normative reason and responding to that reason involves appealing to one's competence or knowledge about how to respond to that reason. But as I explain in section 2, someone might possess a practical competence to respond to her decisive practical reasons to perform an action without having the parallel theoretical

10 Here I am concerned with practical akrasia. There is a similar debate in the epistemology literature about the irrationality of epistemic akrasia and whether evidentialism, as a version of reasons-responsiveness view, can explain that epistemic irrationality. See Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence"; Lasonen-Aarnio, "Enkrasia or Evidentialism?"; Titelbaum, "Rationality's Fixed Point"; Littlejohn, "Stop Making Sense?"; Horowitz, "Epistemic Akrasia"; and Greco, "A Puzzle about Epistemic Akrasia."

11 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for helping me to better articulate and present my case against the reasons-responsiveness view. Here, I borrowed phrasing from the reviewer's comments.

competence to rationally conclude her deliberation by believing that she has decisive reason to perform that action. If possessing a normative reason is a matter of having the ability to respond to that reason, and responding to a reason is grounded in facts about manifesting one's competence about how to respond to that reason, then the mismatch between one's practical and theoretical competences can give rise to a normative mismatch between one's possessed reasons for action and one's possessed reasons about what to believe about one's reasons for action. In the final section, I conclude by considering whether it could be rationally permissible to act against one's own normative judgment about what one ought to do if one's reasons for action diverges from one's reasons for one's judgment about what one ought to do.

1. RESPONDING TO NORMATIVE REASONS

As I mentioned, my argument against the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality relies on a competence-based account of the nature of responding to normative reasons. This section provides a very brief and concise defense of that competence-based account.

A simple account of responding to normative reasons has it that one's ϕ -ing is a response to a normative reason R if and only if (i) R is, as a matter of fact, a normative reason to ϕ , and (ii) R appropriately motivates one to ϕ .¹² In other words, one counts as responding to a normative reason just in case one's motivating reason for acting coincides with the reason normatively justifying the action.¹³ Recently, some philosophers have argued that this conception of responding to normative reasons is problematic.¹⁴ For one thing, let us consider Kant's famous shopkeeper, who, out of mere concern for building his own business, makes sure that he always charges fair prices. As it happens, his

- 12 Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," 205. Spelling out the modifier "appropriately" here requires finding a way to filter cases of deviant causal chains in which a consideration that is a reason for you to ϕ somehow causes you to ϕ , but it does not motivate you to ϕ in the relevant way. As Davidson puts it, "not just any causal connection between rationalizing attitudes and a wanted effect suffices to guarantee that producing the wanted effect was intentional. The causal chain must follow the right sort of route." See Davidson, "Freedom to Act," 78. For suggestions on how to handle this problem, see Turri, "Believing for a Reason"; and McCain, "The Interventionist Account of Causation and the Basing Relation."
- 13 For a highly illuminating discussion of the common distinction between normative reasons and motivating reasons, see Alvarez, "Reasons for Action."
- 14 Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge"; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, ch. 5; Isserow, "Moral Worth and Doing the Right Thing by Accident"; Johnson King, "Accidentally Doing the Right Thing"; Cunningham, "Is Believing for a Normative Reason a Composite Condition?" and "Moral Worth and Knowing How to Respond to Reasons."

actions are always motivated by the very considerations that make them right. Since he wants to earn a reputation as a morally good retailer, he is always particularly careful to consider and act for morally significant features. However, it is obvious that in acting in accordance with moral requirements, the shopkeeper is not genuinely responding to his normative reasons even though his right-doings are motivated by the same considerations that make his actions right (for example, facts about the fairness of a charge).

In response, proponents of the simple account might seem to have at least two options at their disposal. First, they could argue that although the fact about fairness is indeed *part* of the shopkeeper's motivating reason for action, his motivating reason also includes other considerations, the most important of which is that acting fairly is good for business. In that case, there would not be a complete coincidence between his motivating reasons and the normative reasons that make his action right. But what makes for responding to normative reasons is a one-to-one correspondence between one's normative and motivating reasons. For another option, proponents might be inclined to appeal to the instrumental/noninstrumental distinction between one's motivating reasons. The idea is that facts about fairness motivate the shopkeeper's actions only to the extent that fairness promotes financial gain. That is, the shopkeeper's noninstrumental motivating reasons merely include facts about what is pivotal for his business. But then one can argue that responding to normative reasons requires coincidence between one's normative reasons and one's noninstrumental motivating reasons.

However, even such maneuvers cannot save the day for the simple account. To illustrate, let us take a look into an example proposed by Paulina Sliwa.¹⁵ Jean's friend has an important meeting, but she missed the bus that she normally takes to work; arriving late would be a major embarrassment. Out of a noninstrumental desire to spare her friend a major embarrassment, Jean gives her a ride. Other things being equal, Jean's action is the one she has decisive reason to do. The question is whether Jean's action is a response to her decisive normative reason to help her friend. Sliwa argues that even though sparing one's friend a major embarrassment always constitutes a normative reason to help one's friend, there might be circumstances in which one has other weightier reasons against helping one's friend. It is a good thing about Jean that she has some motivation to spare her friend an embarrassment, but having that motivation does not guarantee that Jean's action is a response to the fact that in that particular situation, sparing her friend an embarrassment is a *decisive* normative reason to help her. In other words, it might be a mere accident that

15 Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," 6.

what motivates Jean is the same as what makes her action morally right. Intuitively, accidentally doing the thing that one has decisive normative reason to do is not an instance of responding to decisive normative reasons. How are we to capture this nonaccidentality condition on responding to normative reasons?

Very roughly, one might suggest, following Lord, that *A*'s ϕ -ing is a response to a reason-giving fact, *F*, just in case the normative fact that *F* is a normative reason to ϕ explains why *A* ϕ -ed.¹⁶ Your action cannot be a response to a normative reason unless there is an explanatory connection between your action and the normative features of the fact that motivate you to act accordingly. For you to respond to a reason, it is not sufficient that the reason-giving fact somehow motivates you to act in accordance with that reason. *A*'s ϕ -ing is a proper response to a reason only if the reason-giving fact causes *A* towards ϕ -ing *in virtue of* its normative property that it is a reason for *A* to ϕ . Similarly, one's action is a response to the fact that one has *decisive* reason to act accordingly only if the normative fact that one has that *decisive* reason explains why one performs the action. And that is why Jean's action is not a response to the fact that she has *decisive* reason to help her friend, because Jean may not be sensitive to the decisiveness of the reason for which she acts.

Now, if responding to a normative reason requires that one's action is caused by the very fact that one has that normative reason, then it is natural to suppose that for that causal relation to obtain, one should be aware both of the reason-constituting fact and of the normative fact that one has that normative reason and thus be motivated by one's knowledge that one has that normative reason.¹⁷

However, although responding to normative reasons requires that one somehow recognizes the reason-giving force of the relevant considerations, this recognition need not and should not be spelled out in terms of knowing (or believing) that one has that reason. Among other things, it is not the case that everyone has the ability to have a belief about normative reasons. Presumably, some adults and most children can respond to their reasons and get credit for doing the right thing while they lack the concept of a normative reason, and thus, they cannot have a belief about those reasons. Requiring the presence of a normative belief about reasons overintellectualizes responding to reasons.¹⁸ Furthermore, those who have the concept of a normative reason are not always required (even implicitly) to believe that they have the relevant reason to be

16 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 135–40.

17 Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge"; and Johnson King, "Accidentally Doing the Right Thing."

18 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 1035; and Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be."

able to respond to that reason. You might properly respond to a reason without believing that you have such a reason. For example, consider a situation in which, by controlling your doxastic reactions, a scientist makes sure that you could never have a normative belief about what you ought to do. It seems plausible that by merely acting on your doxastic states, the scientist cannot prevent you from performing the action that you have reason to perform. In many familiar circumstances, we easily and automatically perform the actions that are required of us without bothering ourselves with thinking about what we ought to do. Moreover, as Cunningham and Howard have argued, there are many cases in which one genuinely performs an act of a certain kind while believing that one's action is not of that kind.¹⁹ For example, you can cook the best pie in the world all the while believing that it is one of the worst. In a similar way, you might correctly respond to all your normative reasons while unfairly criticizing yourself for failing to discharge your obligation. Thus, we need to find a middle ground between the simple account of responding to reasons that fails to provide sufficient conditions and the intellectualist account that falls short of coming up with the necessary conditions for responding to normative reasons.

Fortunately, we can find that ground in the concept of a normative *competence* to treat and respond to reasons. For example, Lord, among others, suggests that we respond to a normative reason to ϕ just in case our ϕ -ing is a manifestation of our *knowing how* to use that reason to ϕ .²⁰ Importantly, as Lord emphasizes, the know-how condition for responding to a normative reason does not require that the agent believes that she has that reason. This know-how is a competence that disposes you to get things right and can guarantee the explanatory connection between your action and the fact that your action is supported by the reasons.²¹ If your action is a manifestation of such a competence to treat and respond to reasons, then it cannot be a mere accident that you perform the action that is actually supported by the reasons.²²

As I argued at the outset, the reasons-responsiveness account maintains that rationality is about responding to reasons. Focusing on *responding* to reasons implicates the idea that the only reasons that can contribute to what one is rationally required (or permitted) to do—that is, the reasons that one

19 Cunningham, "Moral Worth and Knowing How to Respond to Reasons"; and Howard, "One Desire Too Many."

20 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 116–23. See also Cunningham, "Moral Worth and Knowing How to Respond to Reasons."

21 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 117.

22 Cf. Mantel, *Determined by Reasons*; Isserow, "Moral Worth and Doing the Right Thing by Accident"; and Howard, "One Desire Too Many."

possesses—are the ones that one is able to respond to. Now, if responding to a reason is a matter of manifesting one's competence to treat and respond to that reason, then possessing a reason is partially grounded upon having such competencies. However, it is noticeable that merely having a general ability or competence to respond to a normative reason is not sufficient for possessing that reason. Moreover, one needs to have the opportunity to manifest that ability or competence when the time comes. For instance, the fact that someone has a heart attack is a normative reason for a highly qualified surgeon to perform heart surgery to help that person. But if the surgeon does not have access to the necessary equipment to perform such a complicated surgery, then she does not possess that reason. Since the surgeon does not possess this reason, we cannot criticize her for failing to respond to it, even if she has the general ability to do so. Furthermore, the fact that one possesses the general ability to correctly respond to a kind of reason (e.g., reasons of beneficence) does not guarantee that with respect to all possible situations, one can determine whether the reasons of beneficence are overriding or defeated by other contrary reasons. One does not possess a normative reason in a particular situation if correctly working out the weight of that reason against the background of other present reasons in that particular situation goes beyond one's general ability and competence to respond to that kind of normative reason. Thus, to possess a normative reason in a particular situation, one also needs to have a specific ability to correctly calculate the normative significance of that reason in that particular situation.²³ We can sum up these points in a tripartite account of possessing normative reasons: for you to possess a reason R to ϕ is for you (i) to be aware of the fact that R obtains, (ii) to have the general competence to treat and respond to R as the reason it is, and (iii) to be in a position to appropriately manifest your competence to treat and respond to R as the reason it is.²⁴

Now, one might think that if we accept a competence-based account of responding to reasons and of possession, then it would immediately follow that there are possible situations in which an agent competently responds to her decisive normative reason to perform an action while at the same time

23 For illuminating discussions about the distinction between the general and specific ability to respond to a reason and having the opportunity to do so, see Way and Whiting, "Reasons and Guidance"; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 235–37; and Schwan, "What Ability Can Do."

24 Following Lord, one may argue that since you cannot be in a position to manifest your general competence to treat and respond to R unless you have that general competence and also know that R obtains, then this tripartite definition boils down to a simple claim to the effect that to possess a reason R just is to be in a position to appropriately manifest one's competence to treat and respond to R as the reason it is (*The Importance of Being Rational*, ch. 3).

she rationally believes that she lacks sufficient reason to act accordingly. But things are not as simple as they appear. The mere fact that she can competently respond to her normative reasons without believing that she has those reasons does not imply that the agent can also *rationally* form a mistaken judgment about the force and direction of her practical reasons. To argue for that conclusion about the structure of one's normative reasons, we need to defend other premises, and that is the task of the next section.

2. THE RATIONAL CRITICIZABILITY OF NORMATIVE JUDGMENTS

In this section, I present an argument against the reasons-responsiveness account to the effect that there can be situations in which your possessed reasons permit you to believe that you ought to ϕ while simultaneously you possess sufficient reasons not to intend to ϕ . In such situations, the reasons-responsiveness view allows for an irrational mismatch between believing that you ought to ϕ and lacking an intention to ϕ . The upshot is that the reasons-responsiveness view cannot account for an important dimension of rationality—that is, it cannot explain why some interesting instances of practical akrasia are irrational. The argument relies on a premise that the possession of a practical normative reason does not guarantee that there is available evidence for being subject to that reason. The rough idea is that one might be in a position to successfully manifest one's practical competence to respond to a decisive practical reason but fail to be in a position to successfully conclude one's deliberation about whether one possess sufficient reasons for performing that action. The existence of the conditions for possessing a practical reason does not guarantee the presence of the necessary conditions for possessing decisive epistemic reasons for believing that one has such a practical reason. To have an intuitive sense of the argument, let us consider the following example.

Apt Emotions: Jane is a morally good person. The special thing about Jane is that, unbeknownst to her, whenever she becomes aware of the morally relevant facts of her own situation, her emotions competently guide her to do what those facts normatively support, such that she has a perfect track record of successfully doing what is morally required of her. Unfortunately, she decides to choose philosophy as her career. In her first year, she attends a course in morality, and her professor convinces her with a bunch of sophisticated philosophical arguments that one never is permitted to break one's promises—that is, facts about one's promises are always normatively overriding. One day, Jane finds herself in a situation where there is a fact of the matter, say, someone being

in urgent need, that provides Jane with a strong reason to break her own promise. Jane is aware of all the relevant facts about her situation, and, as always, her competent emotions strongly motivate her toward doing the right thing (in this case, helping the other person). Nonetheless, when she begins to reflectively deliberate on the relevant features, weighing them against each other, she concludes that she has decisive reason to keep her promise and to refrain from helping the person. Being convinced by those sophisticated philosophical arguments, she thinks that consideration of the person in need cannot defeat the normative force of her own promise. Fortunately, when the time comes, she shows weakness of will and fails to act as she herself believes she ought to. Her emotions retain dominance and guide her toward breaking her promise by helping the person. Jane criticizes herself for demonstrating an irrational weakness.²⁵

What should we say about the normative status of Jane's action (i.e., her helping the other person)? Before attending the ethics course, if Jane were in a similar situation, her competent emotions would have guided her to do what is morally right—that is, helping the other person—despite the fact that this required breaking her promise. In that situation, the correct verdict is that Jane's action is a correct response to her decisive reason to help the person since her motivation to help them is a manifestation of her normative competence to act according to her decisive reasons. In other words, in that situation, it is a fact that Jane correctly responds to her decisive reason to help the person, and this fact is grounded in the fact that her action is a manifestation of her normative competences. But one feature of the grounding relation is that the ground necessitates the grounded. Whenever the ground exists, the grounded also obtains. Now, in the above example, Jane's action is again, a manifestation of her normative competence. And if the underlying fact about the manifestation of competence is present, then what that fact grounds should also be present.

25 As some readers may know, the case has a background in the literature of morality. It is a version of Mark Twain's character Huckleberry Finn that was first introduced by Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn." A similar example also can be found in Weatherston, "Do Judgments Screen Evidence?" Most notably, Nomy Arpaly has discussed a bunch of related examples in order to argue that there are cases of rational akrasia. Arpaly, "On Acting Rationally against One's Best Judgment." However, as I will argue, Arpaly holds that in such cases, the agent's normative belief about what she ought to do is rationally criticizable because it is not a correct response to the agent's evidence. See Arpaly, "On Acting Rationally against One's Best Judgment," 498–500, 503, 505. Regarding Apt Emotions, we have every reason to conclude that Jane's judgment about what she ought to do is rational and fully supported by the evidence she possesses.

Thus, we must conclude that Jane's action is a correct response to the normative reasons that decisively support breaking her promise to help the person in need. (More about this below.)

What about the status of Jane's normative judgment? First of all, I think most of us feel inclined to say that Jane cannot be criticized for her doxastic response regarding what her normative reasons support. Despite knowing that the fact that someone needs help constitutes a good normative reason to help, Jane fails to correctly conclude that this consideration is normatively sufficient for breaking the promise. However, her failure to correctly calculate the practical significance of that consideration is not necessarily a failure of rationality. After all, we are assuming that Jane's tutor, an infamous philosopher, has put forward persuasive philosophical arguments in favor of a view according to which one is never morally permitted to break one's promises. It is due to possessing this misleading piece of evidence that Jane fails to conclude that she ought to do the beneficent thing. Jane inculpably lacks the theoretical competencies to find the flaw in the spurious sophisticated arguments.²⁶ Thus, we cannot legitimately expect her to infer from what she knows that in her particular situation, the reason of beneficence outweighs the normative significance of promise-keeping.²⁷ The fact that Jane's doxastic reaction to her normative situation is *not criticizable*, I submit, suggests that the normative judgment she holds is *rational* in the sense of being a correct doxastic response to all her *possessed* epistemic

26 When I write that Jane's doxastic failure is due to her lack of theoretical competencies to find the flaws in those misleading philosophical arguments, I do not mean that Jane lacks the *general* ability or competence to successfully judge that she ought to do the beneficent thing. It is just that she is not in an ordinary position to successfully *exercise* her general ability to work out the balance of reasons through conscious deliberation. As I argue, possessing a cluster of considerations, *R*, as a sufficient reason to believe that one ought to ϕ requires that one be in a position to manifest her general ability and competence to treat and respond to *R* as a sufficient reason for judging that one ought to ϕ . Thus, in Apt Emotions, Jane fails to possess sufficient reasons for judging that she ought to do the beneficent thing because she is not *in a position to exercise* her general theoretical ability to determine whether the reason of beneficence is overriding. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this delicate issue.

27 As Kieran Setiya argues, there seems to be a tight connection between rationality and our legitimate expectations about an agent's actions and attitudes. As a general principle, someone is rationally criticizable in ϕ ing only if she could be legitimately expected not to ϕ . Setiya, "Against Internalism," 275–77. Here, Setiya refers to Michael Smith, who claims that "[one] thing we can legitimately expect of rational agents as such is that they do what they are rationally required to" (*The Moral Problem*, 85).

reasons. If there is any possibility of rational false belief regarding normative matters, Jane's situation seems to be an evident instance of that type.²⁸

In what follows, I will try to clarify how the fact that Jane's judgment is intuitively not criticizable shows that her judgment is rational.²⁹ The general argument goes as follows. First, Jane's doxastic reaction is not criticizable in the sense that she is *excused* for her failure to find out that she ought to do the beneficent thing. Second, Jane is excused for her doxastic failure because she is not rationally *required* to believe that she ought to do the beneficent thing. Third, if Jane is not rationally required to judge that she ought to do the beneficent thing, then she is rationally *permitted* to hold a different judgment, that is, to believe that she is permitted or even ought to keep her promise. Based on that rational permission, Jane's normative judgment that she ought to keep the promise constitutes a *rational* doxastic response.

When we treat an agent's normative judgment as not being criticizable, one of the following might be the case: (i) the agent's doxastic response is not rationally evaluable in the first place (that is, it is subject to an exemption); (ii) the agent's doxastic response is rationally evaluable, and it constitutes a praiseworthy achievement of knowingly believing the truth about the normative issue; or (iii) the agent's response is rationally evaluable, and it constitutes an objective yet blameless normative failure (that is, the agent's failure to find the truth about the normative issue is subject to an excuse).³⁰

Clearly, Jane's doxastic reaction to her normative situation is not subject to an exemption. There is, for instance, no psychological barrier for her to revise her belief about what she has most reason to do; she possesses all the general abilities for revising her judgement. Needless to say, Jane's normative judgment is an unfortunate objective failure to correctly determine what action she has most reason to perform. So she cannot be praised for an achievement as to

28 Some philosophers have argued that one cannot rationally make mistakes about some particular normative matters of fact. For example, Titelbaum argues that it is always irrational to have false beliefs about the requirements of rationality ("Rationality's Fixed Point"). Similarly, according to Littlejohn's account of rationality, there is a special class of propositions about the requirements of rationality that we cannot make rational mistakes about (Littlejohn, "Stop Making Sense?"). Unfortunately, I cannot examine and respond to these arguments here. For recent interesting discussions, see Field, "It's OK to Make Mistakes"; Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence"; and Killoren, "Why Care about Moral Fixed Points?"

29 I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this issue. In doing so, I have borrowed phrasing from the reviewer's comments.

30 For an illuminating discussion about the notion of exemption, see Wallace, *Responsibility and Moral Sentiments*, ch. 6. For recent discussions about the nature and normative role of excuses, see Baron, "Excuses, Excuses"; and Sliwa, "The Power of Excuses."

know the truth about the balance of her normative practical reasons. Jane's normative judgment seems to fall under the third category. She cannot be blamed for her failure to find the truth about the normative significance of the relevant reason-giving facts. Why? For one thing, Jane's inculpable lack of the relevant philosophical competencies provides an excuse for her doxastic failure; it appears to be irrational for Jane to simply ignore those philosophical arguments without having anything specific to say about why they are misleading. For instance, if Jane knew about the reliability of her emotions, she would possess sufficient grounds to suspect that those philosophical arguments are misleading. However, as the example suggests, she does not know about her interesting emotional competencies.

Now, the idea is that the same considerations that provide an excuse for Jane's doxastic failure can also make it the case that she did not possess sufficient reasons to believe the truth about what she ought to do in the first place. Taking account of all her possessed epistemic reasons, Jane's false judgment that she ought to keep the promise is to be considered as a rational doxastic response. The following considerations provide motivations to take this further step.

First, it is noticeable that one cannot be excused for ϕ -ing unless one is *rationally permitted* to ϕ . If one is not rationally permitted to ϕ , then one is rationally required to not- ϕ . But the existence of a rational requirement to not- ϕ excludes the possibility of one's being excused for ϕ -ing. If you are rationally required to perform an action, then you cannot rationally make an excuse for failing to perform that action. The whole point of introducing the notion of a *rational requirement*, distinct from an all-things-considered objective "ought" of reasons, is to determine whether an agent's excuse is or is not acceptable. Thus, there is no such thing as blameless, excused, or inculpable irrationality. The fact that *S* is excused for her ϕ -ing suggests that *S* is not rationally required to refrain from ϕ -ing. And the fact that *S* is not rationally required to refrain from ϕ -ing means that *S* has a rational permission to ϕ —that is, there is a way for *S* to rationally ϕ .³¹

31 The connection between excusability and rational permission is a central feature of recent debates over rationality. As a proponent of the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality, Lord suggests that the most fundamental feature of the kind of rationality that is at stake in recent debates in metaethics and epistemology is its connection to a certain kind of *blame* or *criticism* that we express with words like "senseless," "stupid," "idiotic," and "crazy" (*The Importance of Being Rational*, 4). See also Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 25–30; Parfit, *On What Matters*, 33; and Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 39. It is exactly this essential feature of the property of rationality that explains why the rationality of one's attitudes and actions is to be determined by the reasons that one possesses, that is, the factors that fall within one's epistemic and practical perspective. For a related

To illustrate, consider Jenny, who always comes home at nine o'clock in the evening, and the first thing she does is to flip the light switch in her hallway. She did so this evening. Jenny's flipping the switch caused a circuit to close. By virtue of an extraordinary series of coincidences, which were unpredictable in advance, the circuit's being closed caused a release of electricity (a small lightning flash) in her neighbor's house. Unluckily, her neighbor was in its path and was therefore badly burned.³² From the point of view of all the objective facts, Jenny's flipping the light switch is impermissible—that is, she *objectively ought* to refrain from flipping the switch. But intuitively, Jenny is excused for acting against this objective impermissibility. And Jenny's excusability can be explained in terms of another deontic notion to the effect that Jenny was *rationaly permitted* to flip the light switch. If she was rationally required to refrain from flipping the switch, then there would be no ground to excuse her for doing something that causes her neighbor being badly burned.

The same, I think, is true about Jane's doxastic response to her normative situation. From the objective point of view, Jane excusably fails to believe the truth about what she ought to do. The explanation of why Jane is excused for her objective doxastic failure lies in the fact that there was no *rational requirement* on Jane to believe that she has most reason to break her promise. If Jane is not rationally required to hold the judgment that she has most reason to break her promise, then she is rationally permitted to believe otherwise. And if Jane is rationally permitted to judge that she has most reason to keep her promise, then we must conclude that her normative judgment is rational.

Moreover, the fact that excusability entails rational permission can be explained on the basis of the more fundamental fact that the elements that excuse an agent's failure to act in accordance with normative reasons are the same ones that undermine her possession of the relevant reasons. The considerations that excuse can fulfil their normative function by defeating one's possession of the relevant normative reasons. For instance, the fact that such and such series of extraordinary coincidences are unpredictable in advance provides an excuse for Jenny's objective normative failure because it shows that Jenny does not possess the relevant objective normative reasons. And if Jenny does not possess the relevant objective normative reasons, then she cannot be rationally required to comply with the demands of those reasons. Likewise, the excusability of Jane's doxastic failure can be explained in terms of the fact that she does not possess sufficient epistemic reasons to believe that she ought to

illuminating discussion to the effect that full excusability entails a rational permission, see Bruno, "Being Fully Excused for Wrongdoing."

32 The case is borrowed from Thomson, *The Realm of Rights*, 229. For an influential discussion of this case, see Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 47–52.

do the beneficent thing. The fact that Jane lacks the specific theoretical competencies to find the flaws in the spurious philosophical arguments and the fact that Jane does not know that her emotional reaction is a highly reliable indicator of what she ought to do together explain why her false normative judgment is excused: they make it the case that Jane does not possess the fact that someone needs help as a *decisive* reason to believe that she ought to do the beneficent thing.³³ But if Jane does not possess decisive reason to believe that she ought to do the beneficent thing, then she possesses sufficient reason to conclude her deliberation by judging that she ought to keep the promise. Thus, according to the reasons-responsiveness account, her judgment that she ought to keep the promise is rational. This completes my argument that Jane's normative judgment is rational.³⁴

In reply, friends of the reasons-responsiveness view might insist that if Jane's action is a genuine response to the fact that she has decisive reasons to break the promise and do the beneficent thing, then she must also possess the same decisive reasons for believing that she ought to break the promise and do the beneficent thing. In that case, her judgment that she ought to keep her promise would turn out to be irrational, at least in a strong and objective sense of the term "rationality."³⁵ This is what Markovits argues for regarding the classic case of Huckleberry Finn.³⁶ Out of laudable sympathy, Huck helps his friend Jim, a fugitive, to escape from slavery. However, in the grip of the racist ideology of his culture, he criticizes himself for stealing from Miss Watson, whom he takes to be Jim's "owner." Like Jane, Huck acts against his judgment about what he ought to do, even though his action is, according to Markovits, a correct response

33 Needless to say, Jane possesses the fact that someone needs help as *some* reason to believe that she ought to help that person. But she does not possess this fact as a *decisive* epistemic reason to believe that she ought to do the beneficent thing in that particular situation.

34 It is worth noting that arguing for the rationality of Jane's normative judgment is important for the plausibility of my case against the reasons-responsiveness view, for it makes it even clearer why Jane's practical failure to act in accordance with her own normative judgment is irrational. The enkratic principle of rationality requires agents to conform with what they believe they ought to do. Now, if one rationally holds a judgment about what they ought to do, then one seems to have no way of being fully rational unless one acts in accordance with one's own judgment.

35 For an influential and classic presentation of the distinction between weak and strong rationality, see Goldman, "Strong and Weak Justification." We need to remember that proponents of the reasons-responsiveness account do not endorse dualism about rationality. See Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, ch. 7. They support unificationism: the idea that rationality is a function of responding to reasons. For dualism about rationality, see Fogal, "Rational Requirements and the Primacy of Pressure"; Worsnip, *Fitting Things Together*; and Fogal and Worsnip, "Which Reasons?"

36 Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," 216–17.

to his normative reasons to help Jim. The idea is that Huck's sympathy puts him in direct contact with the normative significance of the fact that Jim is a human being. But Huck intuitively shows some degree of irrationality in acting against his own normative judgment about what he ought to do. Presupposing a reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality, Markovits suggests that if Huck's action is a correct response to his normative reasons, then the apparent irrationality must have something to do with his normative belief. Markovits suggests that the rational criticizability of Huck's normative judgment can be explained in terms of the fact that the "process" by which Huck forms his belief is "deeply flawed."

To examine Markovits's point, it is helpful to discuss a related example suggested by Amia Srinivasan, which involves a clearly objectionable normative belief:

Domestic Violence: Radha lives in rural India, and her husband, Krishnan, regularly beats her. After the beatings, Krishnan often expresses regret for having had to beat her but explains that it was Radha's fault for being insufficiently obedient or caring. Radha finds these beatings humiliating and guilt-inducing; she believes she has only herself to blame and that she deserves to be beaten for her bad behavior. After all, her parents, elders, and friends agree that if she is beaten, it must be her fault, and no one she knows has ever offered a contrary opinion. Moreover, Radha has thoroughly reflected on the issue and concluded that given the natural social roles of men and women, women deserve to be beaten by their husbands when they misbehave.³⁷

Srinivasan maintains that Radha's normative belief that she deserves to be beaten is *intuitively* unjustified, and the explanation lies in the fact that her belief is "the product of a convincing, and systematic, patriarchal illusion" about the role of men and women in society.³⁸ The idea is that if the correct intuitive verdict about Radha's judgment is that she is not only mistaken but also unjustified, then the same verdict and explanation should be true about Huck's and Jane's normative conclusions. There is something importantly in common between the normative judgments of all these figures.

The first point to note is that even if there is an intuitive sense in which Radha's, Huck's, and Jane's beliefs are unjustified, they are all excused for their normative failures. We cannot legitimately expect Radha and Huck to resist the force of the bad ideologies of their cultures. Likewise for Jane. As I argued, Jane

37 Srinivasan, "Radical Externalism."

38 Srinivasan, "Radical Externalism," 399.

is not philosophically competent enough to find the flaw in those philosophical arguments that suggest that we are never permitted to break our promises, but it is not fair to criticize Jane for lacking the sophisticated philosophical competence. Having such competence is not part of being a rational agent. The whole point is that the reasons-responsiveness view cannot capture and explain this important dimension of rational excusability.

Second, it is dubious in the first place whether the reasons-responsiveness theory can adequately explain the purported intuitive data that Radha's normative belief is unjustified. One might think, as Srinivasan does, that the example actually supports the traditional externalist theories of justification that tend to explain the rationality of one's doxastic reaction in terms of facts about the reliability of one's doxastic states. Admittedly, the testimonial reasons on which Radha based her normative belief are highly unreliable indicators, but Radha possesses no reason to question the reliability of her misleading reasons. Similarly, Markovits is right that Huck's moral reasoning is deeply flawed, but Huck does not possess any reason to conclude that there is something objectionable about the conclusion of his moral reasoning.³⁹ Similarly, even though Jane's emotions put her in direct contact with the genuine normative force of helping the person in need, she does not know how to use this fact as a defeater for all those philosophical arguments that allegedly support the idea that she should always keep her promises. In a nutshell: even if we admit that Jane's normative judgment about her reasons remains unreliable and thus, in an important sense, unjustified, the reasons responsiveness who wants to acknowledge the role of one's competence and know-how in responding to reasons and possessing them cannot explain the justificatory status of Jane's belief in terms of the normative reasons she possesses.

The latter point about reasoning might seem to suggest another line of resistance for proponents of the reasons-responsiveness view. In their recent paper, Way and Whiting argue that whenever *S* justifiably believes that she ought to ϕ , then as a matter of fact, *S* ought to ϕ .⁴⁰ In the language of reasons, if *S* believes for sufficient reasons that she has decisive reasons to ϕ , then she has decisive reasons to ϕ . This is what they call *ought infallibilism*. If ought infallibilism is true, then either Jane's belief that she ought to keep her promise is not sufficiently supported by reasons, or she has decisive reason to keep the promise

39 The point is that the flaw in Huck's reasoning lies not even in the general rules that Huck follows but rather in the unsound premises that he takes, albeit excusably, for granted. Huck's moral reasoning begins with an unfortunate socially given belief to the effect that helping Jim escape amounts to stealing from Miss Watson. And Huck knows that he is not morally permitted to help satisfy a friend's desire if so doing requires thievery.

40 Way and Whiting, "If You Justifiably Believe that You Ought to ϕ , You Ought to ϕ ."

and therefore lacks decisive reasons to do the beneficent thing. Either way, reasons-responsiveness theory does not provide Jane with rational permission to act against her own normative judgment.

Way and Whiting's argument for ought infallibilism goes as follows.

1. Since it is correct reasoning to move from the belief that you ought to ϕ to deciding to ϕ , then if you justifiably believe that you ought to ϕ , you would be justified in deciding to ϕ .
2. If you justifiably believe that you ought to ϕ , then you can have no other justified attitude from which you could correctly reason to decide not to ϕ . This is because if you can reason from one of your justified attitudes toward deciding not to ϕ , this shows that your justification for believing that you ought to ϕ is defeated.
3. If you have no other justified attitude from which you could correctly reason to decide not to ϕ , you lack justification for deciding not to ϕ .
4. If you are justified in deciding to ϕ , and you lack justification for deciding not to ϕ , then you ought to decide to ϕ . Assuming that reasons for attitudes are restricted to object-given reasons, since you ought to decide to ϕ , you ought to ϕ .
5. Therefore, if you justifiably believe that you ought to ϕ , then you ought to ϕ .

The core idea is that since Jane can correctly reason from her justified belief that she ought to keep her promise to deciding to keep her promise, she must have justification to decide to keep her promise and refrain from helping the person in need. Moreover, Jane cannot correctly reason from her belief that someone needs help to deciding to break her promise and help the person because if it is a correct reasoning route available to Jane, then her normative belief that she ought to keep her promise would turn out to be unjustified. So, either Jane's normative belief is not justified, or she lacks decisive reasons to break her promise and do the beneficent thing.

I have two responses. The first is against the second premise of the above argument. Way and Whiting suggest that if one has a justified attitude from which one can correctly reason toward deciding not to ϕ , then one lacks justification for believing that one ought to ϕ ; that is, one's justification for that attitude can defeat whatever justification one has for believing that one ought to ϕ . In *Apt Emotions*, Jane's emotions lead her to break the promise in response to the reason that someone needs help. This transition seems to be correct reasoning from Jane's justified belief that someone needs help toward breaking the promise; after all, it is an instance of responding to a decisive reason, and at least in a broad sense of the term "reasoning," responding to decisive reasons

constitutes correct reasoning. Moreover, this reasoning route is available to Jane because of her emotional character. But having such an incredible emotional character does not guarantee that there is a parallel correct reasoning route available to Jane to reason from her justified belief that someone needs help toward revising her normative belief that she ought to keep her promise. As I understand it, Apt Emotions highlights the possibility of an asymmetrical structure between the reasoning routes that are available to an agent. Why should there be such an asymmetry here?⁴¹

The rough idea is this: Jane's emotional character puts her in touch with the normative fact that in her particular situation, the reason-giving significance of helping the person is relatively weightier than the normative significance of keeping her promise. Other things being equal, this normative recognition, provided by her emotional competence, would constitute sufficient grounds for Jane to believe that her reasons decisively support doing the beneficent thing. However, as to the details of the example, other things aren't equal. For one thing, Jane has strong albeit misleading evidence, provided by some spurious philosophical arguments, that she is never permitted to break her promises. She might also have been introduced to some recent neuroscientific findings that purportedly show that the moral testimony of one's emotional dispositions is generally unreliable.⁴² As long as Jane is not in a position to successfully exercise her theoretical competencies to find the flaw in those sophisticated arguments, she cannot *rationaly* rely on her emotional reaction to judge that she ought to help the person. From her deliberative viewpoint, whatever reason she has to break her promise is defeated by the relevant philosophical arguments. At the same time, the fact that Jane lacks such relevant theoretical competencies does not preclude her from being in a position to correctly respond to the fact that someone needs help as a decisive reason to help the person. Jane's action is a manifestation of an emotional competence that correctly detects the overriding normative force of doing the beneficent thing. Despite all those misleading arguments, Jane recognizes that the reason-giving significance of helping the person is weightier than the normative force of keeping her promise. And her action is firmly guided and nonaccidentally motivated by her direct access to this normative fact.

To further clarify the latter point, consider Katie, who senses a strong fear whenever she sees a dangerous spider. Suppose that there is a lawlike, reliable

41 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this question. As they have argued, this challenge targets the core of my case against reasons-responsiveness theory and needs to be dealt with, even if, in the end, we agree that Way and Whiting's argument is unsound for other reasons.

42 For instance, she may have been introduced to Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul" but not to Berker, "The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience."

connection between the perceptual appearance of a spider and the danger it poses. Unbeknownst to her, Katie is highly sensitive to the nuances of perceptual appearance of different types of spiders, and her fear is always a competent response to the detection of that lawful connection. Unfortunately, Katie receives misleading information from a scientist that spiders of a particular type are harmless. One day she sees a member of that type and believes that it is harmless. Thankfully, however, her fear does not listen to what she believes and causes her to run. Now, it seems to me that despite her competent emotional reaction to the appearance of the dangerous spider, Katie cannot correctly reason from her recognition of the dangerousness of that spider to the conclusion that the testimony of the scientist is misleading. After all, she does not know that she possesses such an extraordinary capacity. At the same time, it seems highly plausible that Katie's fear is a correct and competent response to her normative situation. It is the result of her accurate identification of the danger of that spider. I suggest that something similar happens to Jane and her morally competent emotions. Jane's emotional character puts her in a position to correctly discern the moral significance of the facts in her situation, and she successfully responds to her recognition by doing the beneficent thing. However, she cannot treat her emotional reaction as a conclusive reason against the misleading philosophical arguments and believe that she has decisive reason to break her promise. Like Katie, she is inculpably ignorant about the reliability of her emotional capacities.⁴³

One way to make Jane's normative situation intelligible is to say that it is a case of acting for a decisive moral reason without knowing or even being in a position to know that one acts for such a reason.⁴⁴ Arpaly nicely brings out the same point when discussing the case of Huckleberry Finn:

Talking to Jim and interacting with him, Huckleberry constantly *perceives* data (never deliberated upon) that amount to the impression that Jim is a full person, just like Huckleberry himself. While he never

43 One might object that if Jane cannot rationally revise her normative judgment on the basis of her successful recognition of the overriding force of the fact that someone needs help, then, and because of this, her act of doing the beneficent thing is not a genuine response to the same normative fact. In reply, we must notice that the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality aims to provide a *reductive* explanation of facts about rationality in terms of facts about competent response to normative reasons. Thus, proponents of this view cannot coherently challenge my verdict that Jane's action is a *competent response* to her normative situation advertent to the fact that it is not *rational* for her to revise her normative judgment on the basis of her recognition of the overriding normative force of benevolence.

44 For interesting related discussion in epistemology, see Lasonen-Aarnio, "Unreasonable Knowledge"; Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence," 157–58; and Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence."

deliberates on his perceptions, they prompt him increasingly to act toward Jim as a friend. . . . The idea that we can sometimes act for moral reasons without knowing that we act for moral reasons is not strange when posed against the background of epistemology and psychology, where many have maintained that we can know without knowing that we know, believe without believing that we believe, or *act for a reason without knowing that we act for a reason*.⁴⁵

For another take, one might be inclined to understand Jane's reaction in terms of the notion of performative expertise, as Cholbi suggests:

Performative experts have the ability to "get it right" within a particular domain, without being able to articulate or justify how the expert gets things right. The skilled marksman or musician displays performative expertise when she hits the target or executes a beautiful musical performance without being able to elaborate the steps by which she achieved these ends or even the criteria for excellence in meeting those ends.⁴⁶

In a nutshell, although Jane is not a *deliberative expert* with respect to moral questions in the sense that we cannot seek advice from her about the normative matters, she functions, in virtue of her emotional competencies, like a moral compass or a performative expert who knows how to correctly react to her normative situation.⁴⁷ One way or another, Jane seems to be trapped in an asymmetrical normative situation.

The second point about Way and Whiting's argument concerns their first premise. Undoubtedly, it is correct reasoning if you move from the belief that you ought to ϕ to deciding to ϕ . Accordingly, there is a sense in which you are always permitted to reason in that way. But the question is: How are we to understand and interpret such permission? Way and Whiting suggest that the correctness of enkratic reasoning entails that if you believe that you ought to ϕ based on sufficient reasons, then you have sufficient reason for deciding to ϕ . They hold that you are normatively permitted to reason from your (justified) normative belief that you ought to ϕ to deciding to ϕ in the sense of normative permission that is related to normative reasons. However, this is not the only possible interpretation. One might, following John Broome, argue that we should account for the correctness of reasoning rules in terms of rational

45 Arpaly, "Moral Worth," 229–30 (emphasis added).

46 Cholbi, "Moral Expertise and the Credentials Problem," 235. See also Weinstein, "The Possibility of Ethical Expertise."

47 For related discussion about the notion of a performative expert, see Shepherd, "Practical Structure and Moral Skill."

permissions.⁴⁸ Enkratic reasoning is a correct rule because you are rationally permitted to move from your (rational) belief that you ought to ϕ to deciding to ϕ . In other words, the rationality of your normative judgment that you ought to ϕ can make it the case that you are rationally permitted to decide to ϕ . From such rational permission, one cannot draw the kind of permission that is related to normative reasons unless one presupposes the reasons-responsive theory of rationality. But that is exactly what is at issue here.

Way and Whiting nonetheless might insist that there is a close connection between correct reasoning and reasons. And I do admit that if my belief that I ought to ϕ is correct, then it would certainly be correct for me to decide to ϕ . According to a plausible account, a belief in p is correct if and only if p is true. Thus, my belief that I ought to ϕ is correct if and only if it is true that I ought to ϕ . And if it is true that I ought to ϕ , then it is obviously correct for me to decide to ϕ . But we must be careful not to conflate the fact that a belief is correct with the fact that one possesses sufficient reasons for having that belief. Correctness is a function of all the objective normative reasons out there, whether possessed or unpossessed.

Finally, one might follow Karen Jones in arguing that we must distinguish between two kinds of relations in which one stands vis-à-vis reasons.⁴⁹ According to the first kind, which we can call *responding* to reasons, agents guide their actions according to a conception of the reasons as *normative reasons*. This kind of action-guidance requires the capacity for reflection, and the agent must be able to judge the balance of the reasons she has. This is something that we can attribute to the *agent* as the thing that she does. But there can be another relation with reasons, namely, *tracking* reasons, which does not require the agent to guide her action through reflection about her reasons. In this sense, an agent can reliably track the reasons in a nonreflective way even though she cannot deliberately guide herself towards performing that action with the help of a judgment about the reasons she has.

In Apt Emotions, as long as Jane's reflective abilities are concerned, she rationally judges that she has decisive reason to keep her promise, and it is not rationally possible for her to believe that the fact that someone needs help makes it the case that she has decisive reason to break her promise. And thus, she is not in a position to *respond* to the reason she has for helping that agent. The correct description of Jane's performance is to say that she merely tracks the relevant decisive reason in virtue of the sub-agential, reliable capacity she has for tracking reasons. She acts as a reason tracker, not as a reason responder.

48 Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*.

49 Jones, "Emotion, Weakness of Will, and the Normative Conception of Agency," 189.

Now, the suggestion is that if Jane cannot act as a reason responder with respect to the fact that someone needs help, this fact cannot contribute to what is *rational* for her to do. The reasons that can make a difference to the rational status of one's actions and attitudes are the reasons one can respond to—but not the reasons that one can only track.

Two points are in order. First, remember that in the previous section, I argued that whether an agent's (doxastic or practical) reaction is a correct response to her normative reasons is a matter of the existence of an explanatory relation between her performance and the relevant normative truths about reasons, and that explanatory connection can obtain even in the case of tracking reasons. When one tracks a normative reason to ϕ , the fact that one has such a reason can and does explain one's ϕ -ing.

Second, and more importantly, I explained at the outset that one of the most interesting features of the reasons-responsiveness account of rationality is that this theory can vindicate the normativity of rationality in the sense that the same things—that is, (possessed) normative reasons—determine both what one ought to do and what one is rationally required to do. I think it is highly plausible that the set of reasons that contributes to what one ought to do (or what one is justified to do) must include the reasons that one can only track. If we restrain the potent reasons to the reasons that one can only respond to in this demanding sense of responding to reasons, there cannot be any normative truth about what children or some adults ought to do. Presumably, children and some adults lack the concept of a reason, or they lack relevant reflective abilities required for responding to reasons. But if we assume that the potent reasons include all and only the reasons that one can reflectively respond to, then it would be inappropriate to say that those who lack such reflective abilities ought to do something or that they have justification to perform an action. But this is utterly unacceptable. The potent, ought-making reasons must include the reasons that one can merely track. Thus, if it is true that the same things must determine what one ought to do and what one is rationally required to, as the reasons-responsiveness theory assumes, then we must allow the reasons that one can only track among the rationalizing reasons.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE IRRATIONALITY OF AKRASIA

In the previous section, I have argued for and explained why it is metaphysically possible that the demand of one's reasons for action diverges from what is rational for one to believe about one's reasons. There are situations in which, from the perspective of normative reasons, an agent is required to act against her rationally held judgment about what she ought to do. And this suggests that

the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality is untenable because in those situations, the agent's action against her own normative judgment about what she ought to do is plainly irrational. That is, there is something to rationality that is beyond the reach of the reasons-responsiveness theory.

As a last resort, the proponents of the reasons-responsiveness view might be tempted to question the latter idea, arguing that it is not always irrational to act against one's own judgment about what one ought to do. And I do agree that there are cases in which one's acting against one's own normative judgment cannot be rationally criticized. But the structure of those cases is markedly different from cases in which there is a mismatch between one's reasons for action and one's reasons for having an attitude towards what the reasons demand. For example, suppose that an evil demon ensures that whenever you come to rationally believe that you ought to do something, you fail to intend to bring it about. In that case, your failure to adjust your intentions with what you believe about what you ought to do is not an instance of irrationality, even though from an objective point of view, your mental states involve incoherency. You cannot be rationally criticized for the failure, since the failure is excusable. Or consider a more mundane situation in which you have come to believe that you are normatively required to save someone's life from a grave danger, but your fear paralyzes you such that you cannot take the necessary course of action. Again, it seems highly plausible that you are not rationally criticizable for your failure because we cannot legitimately expect people to overcome such a complete though local inability.⁵⁰ But we cannot assume that whenever an agent responds to her decisive reasons to perform an action while she rationally believes that she ought to take another option is a case where she loses her ability to materialize her normative judgment to the extent that her failure turns out to be rationally excused.

In response, one might argue that the above cases do not exhaust all of the cases of rational akrasia. After all, everyone has to agree that correctly responding to reasons is at least part of what rationality consists in. Thus, even if there are cases where the demands of one's normative reasons require one to be in an otherwise irrationally incoherent state, since the rational force of responding to reasons is always greater than the rational significance of being coherent, then overall, one is always rationally required to follow the guide of one's possessed reasons.⁵¹ Moreover, it is not clear what kind of normative achievement one would demonstrate if one were to act in accordance with one's false normative judgment. Would it be any better for you to refrain from performing the action

50 But cf. Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, 173.

51 Arpaly, "Moral Worth," 36.

that you have decisive reason to perform just because you rationally believe that you ought to take another option?

I have two points in response. First, we must notice that sometimes agents are caught in unfortunate dilemmatic situations in which there is no chance of perfect normative success. Old examples include situations in which our evidence decisively suggests that we ought to adopt an incorrect belief such that acting on that belief would bring about a disaster. We cannot explain the importance of rationality unless we adopt a long-run perspective. Even though our disposition to follow the lead of our rational normative judgments does not always guide us towards performing the best option, it is still a highly valuable disposition, and we cannot arbitrarily prevent its manifestation if we aren't in a position to determine whether we are in a case where it leads us astray.

Second, the above argument presupposes that facts about rationality are or entail facts about decisive reasons. The idea is that if in your acting against your own judgment about what you ought to do you are actually responding to the balance of your normative reasons, then there cannot be anything criticizable about your performance. But from the perspective of normative reasons, that there is nothing criticizable about your performance does not imply that you cannot be criticizable from the perspective of rationality unless we already assume that rationality is a matter of responding to normative reasons.

There is something distinctively wrong about acting against one's rational judgment about what one ought to do. And we cannot explain that distinctive kind of failure in terms of facts about normative reasons. Now, whether we should identify this particular type of failure as a failure of rationality or a failure of another sort is, I suspect, a verbal dispute.⁵² My case against the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality provides a new argument for skepticism about the strong normativity of rationality.⁵³ The normativity of rational requirements cannot be explained in terms of the demands of decisive normative reasons.⁵⁴

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52 See Lasonen-Aarnio, "Enkrasia or Evidentialism?" and "Coherence as Competence."

53 Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?"

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